

# COLLEGE WOMEN WHO EXPRESS FUTILITY

*A Study Based on Fifty Selected Life Histories  
of Women College Graduates*

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*"If one believes life is futile  
he does not possess the zest required for a full life."*

—WILLIAM JAMES

## Preface

The present study has developed as an outgrowth of an earlier study of one hundred college women begun at the Merrill-Palmer School, Detroit, Michigan, in September 1932, under a grant from the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation. Plans for the original investigation were *to discover the needs of a group of women and, if possible, to determine the effectiveness of their education in meeting these needs*. One hundred case studies of women college graduates comprised the body of data used. This material was collected during the period from 1932 to 1937. Analysis of the data and preparation for publication covered the next five years. The first complete report of the investigation, *Women After College*, by Robert G. Foster and Pauline Park Wilson, was published in July 1942. The publication presented general findings of the research.

The women who gave their histories for the study were a representative group of college graduates living in Detroit. Some cooperated in the study because of interest in an educational undertaking and others because of their need for counseling service. The women who participated in the undertaking were graduates of forty-four different colleges and universities representing the East, South, West, and Midwest, with 26 percent of them women's colleges and 74 percent coeducational institutions. The women were young, as was indicated by the mean age—thirty years for the married women and twenty-six for the single. Each family with children averaged 1.27 child per family.

While analyzing data for the earlier study, the investigator observed that frustrating or problem situations among the women often were accompanied by *expressions of futility*. The occurrence was so frequent that the question arose: "Why do women of

superior intelligence, above average in socio-economic standing and of good educational advantages, express to any extent a sense of futility?" Other questions followed. If the women felt futile and of little use in that which they were doing, what in their past or present made them feel this way? Why did they not do something active to correct it? To what extent did feeling futile seem to be destructive or constructive as a reaction? Was it a common reaction among others outside this group? Could corrective or educational methods be used to overcome or reduce this reaction, and was such elimination a desirable goal? The present investigation was started in the hope that some light might be shed on these answers and others. The background for this undertaking is found in the earlier study.

#### THE ORIGINAL STUDY OF COLLEGE WOMEN'S PROBLEMS

The one hundred life histories used in the original study amounted to volumes, for they averaged 66,650 words per history. The time of collecting the data for each history varied from one to three years, depending upon the individual. Each single interview lasted on an average two hours. All the data that could be accumulated on a woman, including background history, development, and present status, were brought together in order to understand her, her problems, and the use she made of her education. With the data in hand, analysis of the histories took the following form:

Once the life histories were recorded, the next step was to analyze them in such a way as to learn how college training had prepared these women to carry on their lives, meeting daily problems and major and minor crises.

The first step, accordingly, was to select several cases at random and to read them with the purpose of finding some method by which the problem situations could be extracted and placed in a framework that would not only demonstrate the range of problems met but also maintain the interrelatedness and continuity of the material.

*A problem was considered to be any situation sufficiently perplexing to cause anxiety, in whatever degree, before a solution of some kind could be effected.* The amount of anxiety shown and the difficulty involved in solving the problem determined its seriousness. As cases were read, every situation that in the judgment of the several investigators offered a problem was labeled as such.

A series of twenty-one classifications was finally developed for the problems encountered by the one hundred women. These were as follows: attitude toward self; status; attitudes toward husband; relationship with husband; relationship with children; relationship with parents and relatives; relationship with in-laws; relationship with associates; sex relations; health of self; health of family; religion; education; vocation; finances; housekeeping; community participation; recreation; and crises. These classifications may best be defined by illustrative excerpts from the cases as they were recorded in the various categories.

Three investigators were responsible for reading and classifying the data, after the preliminary work of defining types, establishing methods for the cross-recording of interrelated problems, resolving disagreements over classification, and developing a uniform technique among the investigators was completed.

During the long and arduous task of bringing the data to this point, the investigators saw certain trends demonstrated, the evolution of some theoretical concepts and the refutation of others, indications for more extensive or more precise investigation, and certain implications for women's education. In the following chapters the findings are offered in such a way as: (1) to present an overview of the problems of this group of one hundred college women; (2) to scrutinize the various types of problems and their relative degrees of importance; (3) to consider individual constellations of problems; (4) to discuss the concepts, generalizations, and conclusions in the light of the data; and (5) to show the implications of the study for the education of women.<sup>(18)\*</sup>

#### THE PRESENT STUDY

The approach to this study of *expressed futility* is qualitative and subjective. The author believes that any attempt to quantify the problem by analysis of a limited number of factors would destroy understanding of the totality of individual life patterns of which reacting to frustration is a part, and would nullify the real value that the investigation might have.

Fifty of the original case histories of women college graduates are used in the study. A survey of psychological and sociological literature dealing with personality development and interpretation, interviews with psychiatrists and educators outstanding in their fields, and innumerable contacts with women of all ages under clinical and teaching situations, together with the histories, comprise the background for the present investigation.

\* Numbers in parentheses refer to numbered references in the Bibliography.

With the study divided into eleven chapters, the presentation is as follows: Chapter I gives the purpose of the research; Chapter II develops the theory of futility; Chapter III describes the population studied; Chapter IV gives the method used for analyzing histories; Chapters V, VI, VII, and VIII present findings of the study, the results of analyzed data; Chapter IX gives condensed histories; Chapter X sets forth the author's results and conclusions; while Chapter XI offers educational implications.

Excerpts from the histories are freely used for illustrative purposes. Where condensed histories are presented, the material is disguised in such a way as to prevent identification of the women. The word "interviewer" refers to the individuals who recorded the histories; "investigator" is used to refer to the author.

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*January 1948*

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My indebtedness, incurred during the preparation of this study, is widespread. The fifty women who gave so freely and unstintedly of themselves in the compilation of their life histories deserve far more for making the undertaking possible than this anonymous expression of appreciation. I am indeed grateful to many of my friends and acquaintances who contributed invaluable ideas and bits of evidence to the investigation.

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# Contents

I. <i>Introduction: A Study of Futility</i>	1
II. <i>What Is Futility?</i>	10
III. <i>Description of Population: Fifty Women College Graduates</i>	21
IV. <i>Method for Determining Presence of Futility</i>	31
V. <i>Findings: Analyses of Fifty Cases</i>	53
VI. <i>Findings: On Parent Relationships</i>	73
VII. <i>Findings: On Sex Adjustment</i>	77
VIII. <i>Findings: About Life in General</i>	81
IX. <i>Six Life Histories</i>	85
X. <i>Conclusions: Why Is Futility Felt?</i>	127
XI. <i>Implications of the Study: What Might Be Done?</i>	136
APPENDIX	
A. <i>History Analysis</i>	153
B. <i>Population Data</i>	158
C. <i>Brief Outline for Intensive Research—Life Histories</i>	160
D. <i>Bibliography</i>	162



COLLEGE WOMEN  
WHO EXPRESS FUTILITY

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## CHAPTER I

### *Introduction: A Study of Futility*

During the course of human life nearly every individual has the experience of feeling futile or useless. When frustrated in an effort to attain a desired goal, one's reaction of hopelessness is not unusual. A sense of futility may be only momentary, but as a state of mind it represents "dead center."

Feelings of futility indicate an attitude of defeat in the face of failure. Such an attitude is not conducive to a progressive and dynamic solution of a problem. Survival itself often depends upon the individual's ability to meet difficulties with effort and ingenuity. Under certain circumstances a sense of futility may be useful, as, in the case of death, when in order to face the situation realistically one must accept the futility of continued struggle. Ordinarily, a mental state of hopelessness prevents effective solution of a difficult situation.

A defeatist attitude negates *happiness*, the end toward which all persons strive. One author gives happiness as the quest of life;<sup>(30)\*</sup> another refers to it as the aim of all human beings;<sup>(31)</sup> and still another considers happiness the basic urge of the human organism.<sup>(17)</sup> Philosophers, ministers, psychologists, and sociologists propose various ways of achieving the goal of happiness. All of them imply the use of effort by means of adjustment, attack, substitution, or planning, but seldom an attitude of hopelessness if the desired goal is to be reached.

Philosophical and general discussions of happiness are frequently found in literature. Fosdick says happiness depends upon personal integration and the achievement of wholeness and unity within the individual.<sup>(17)</sup> Sheldon states that "Happiness is essentially a state

\* Numbers in parentheses refer to numbered references in the Bibliography, pp. 163 to 167.

of going somewhere, wholeheartedly, one-directionally, without regret or reservation."<sup>(174)</sup> Another concept of happiness is to make a plan of life, to develop a technique of control.<sup>(17)</sup> Again, the goal of happiness lies in the path of conquest and is dependent upon both the self and external circumstances.<sup>(68)</sup> A popular idea of attaining happiness can be found in the get-rich-quick doctrines of certain modern writers. Accordingly, this happiness is available to anyone who wishes it and who will make the effort by tackling vigorously the problems of life.<sup>(60)</sup>

Psychoanalysis sets forth the pleasure principle, closely reinforced by the reality principle, as the goal for which all human beings strive. The pleasure principle, through its vigorous motivation in early childhood, helps to establish and fix the individual's aim in life.<sup>(31)</sup> Through the channels of individual psychology, Adler gives as the major goal in life *cooperation* with others, without which happiness is not possible.<sup>(1)</sup> He draws the conclusion that people whose goals are not social and cooperative must inevitably feel: "You are useless. Nobody wants you. Go!"

Studies of happiness are numerous. They range from those moralistic in tone<sup>(30)</sup> to statistical studies.<sup>(100)</sup> Self-rating of happiness forms the basis of most of the studies that have been made.<sup>(69) (98) (113)</sup> Predicting happiness in specific areas of experience is a new approach to the study of happiness. Terman, as well as Burgess and Cottrell, has made studies of large groups of married couples in an attempt to determine those who have achieved happiness and to find the factors associated with it.<sup>(5) (77)</sup> Research on the sexual life of women, and men also, sheds light on the problem of gaining happiness as a common goal.<sup>(8) (10) (11)</sup>

Happy individuals seem to be those who are able to make adjustments to the problems which are common to both happy and unhappy people.<sup>(109)</sup> No evidence seems available which connects happiness with feelings of futility. To link acceptance and resignation with happiness may be possible, but seeking happiness is scarcely congruent with an attitude of defeat.

Happiness develops in spite of frustration and failure and not because of the absence of difficulty. John Stuart Mill says that any happiness which one can expect is imperfect. Those individuals more highly endowed will never find complete happiness, but they

are better able to bear the "imperfections" of that happiness which they do achieve.<sup>(33)</sup> William James states in this regard that "... however enthusiastically it [life] may begin [it] is sure to end in sadness."<sup>(37)</sup>

In order to achieve happiness, the goal of human beings, the vicissitudes of life must be met and overcome. An attitude of defeat usually interferes with attainment of this ultimate goal. A sense of futility prevents a dynamic, positive adaptation in the face of frustration.

Whether or not futility exists as a universal problem the present study is not prepared to investigate, but must confine itself to the limits of the material available. Since the data assembled concern women, the analysis of their life histories will yield findings on a particular group of women only. This, however, does not in any way imply that the problem of futility is confined to one sex or to any one age or to any one social status. During the course of this study the investigator accumulated concerning persons of various ages and backgrounds material drawn from clinical experience, modern literature, reports of youth meetings, college student histories, casual conversations, correspondence and conferences with professional psychologists, psychiatrists, ministers, and educators, in addition to the material furnished by the fifty life histories used in the study.

An excellent statement on the universality of the problem was made by Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick in answer to a question about the existence of the feelings of futility:

The sense of futility is very widespread today, not simply among mature men and women, but among young people as you know. . . . I am reminded of a terrible saying of Henry David Thoreau, "Most people live lives of quiet desperation." If that were true when Thoreau were here, it is, I think, a lot truer today.

I am unable to distinguish men from women with regard to the experience of futility. Indeed, if my experience counted for anything I should say that men suffer more from it than women do. There is a certain native courage in a woman, when it comes to a problem of fortitude, that often amazes me and makes me think that, while men may be more vigorous in active and aggressive attack on life, women are the stronger when it comes to fortitude and endurance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Correspondence with Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, November 20, 1939.

In her book on self-analysis, Horney indicates the serious limitations to self-understanding when an individual feels hopeless about his own struggles and conflicts. According to her, hopelessness exists to a degree in every intense neurosis. If constructive feelings are not entirely crushed, some revitalizing may be accomplished. She continues her discussion, saying:

This attitude of resignation may be entirely conscious, expressing itself in a pervasive feeling of futility concerning one's own life or in a more or less elaborate philosophy of the futility of life in general. Often it is reinforced by a pride in belonging among the few people who have not blinded themselves to this "fact." In some persons no such conscious elaboration has taken place; they are merely passive, endure life in a stoical way, and no longer respond to any prospect of a more meaningful existence.

Such resignation may be hidden also behind a feeling of boredom with life, as in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*. Her expectations are extremely meager. Life should be entertaining now and then, should provide some fun or thrill or excitement, but she expects nothing of positive value. This attitude is often accompanied—as it is in *Hedda Gabler*—by a profound cynicism, the result of a disbelief in any value in life and in any goal to strive for. But a profound hopelessness may exist also in persons one would not suspect of it, persons who superficially give the impression of being capable of enjoying life. They may be good company, enjoy eating, drinking, sexual relations. In adolescence they may have been promising, capable of genuine interests and genuine feelings. But for some reason or other they have become shallow, have lost their ambition; their interest in work has become perfunctory, their relationships with people are loose, easily made and easily terminated. In short, they, too, have ceased to strive for a meaningful existence and have turned to the periphery of life instead.<sup>(33)</sup>

Reports from a youth conference on counseling and guidance showed that the problem of futility among young college students was of deep concern to that assembly of leaders. Two major discussions, "Student Problems Arising Out of a Sense of Futility" and "The Sense of Futility As One Faces Problems in the World," were led by Dr. John M. Moore, Hamilton College, and Dr. Warren T. Powell, Boston University, respectively. The consensus of this group was that "the feeling [futility] is common to all persons . . . not merely college students. . . . However, a long continued sense of futility results in despair and loss of efficiency."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Hazen Conference on Student Guidance and Counseling, 1939.

In a collection of some five hundred autobiographies of college students made over a period of years, a sense of futility about their college work, jobs, social status, marital chances, family adjustment, opportunities in the world, and about themselves in general was revealed.<sup>3</sup>

Clinical records of a family consultation service which dealt with so-called normal people indicated that expressions of futility were frequently recorded. The following excerpts were taken from some service cases:

"I have tried everything but I feel sure nothing will ever work with him."

"I guess I am just hopeless."

"Why is it that whenever you have things going smoothly, something always happens to spoil it all? Can't you ever feel that things will stay worked out?"<sup>4</sup>

Casual conversation has produced the most varied and repeated expressions of futility which serve as substantial indicators of the universality of the problem. The graying spinster of sixty approaching retirement from long years of teaching, the childless well-to-do married woman in her early forties, the woman of thirty-five who relinquished her profession for husband and children, the woman of thirty who has a good job but no husband, the girl of twenty-five who lacks social opportunity, and the girl of twenty who is still overprotected by her parents were among the many who expressed themselves definitely on this point. Then again it was the young husband who volunteered the statement that his wife felt futile because of her routine of housework, the mother who showed anxiety in the face of her young daughter's lack of interest in anything, and the daughter who sought ways of helping her aging parents feel worth while; but each in turn added further evidence of futility.

Throughout literature, many allusions to futility are found. The existence of these feelings is pointed out in the writings of Homer,<sup>(37)</sup> Thoreau,<sup>(17)</sup> William James,<sup>(37)</sup> John Stuart Mill,<sup>(53)</sup> and others. Modern novels, essays, and journals indicate such a

<sup>3</sup> Sociology classes, University of Alabama.

<sup>4</sup> Advisory Service for College Women, Detroit, Michigan.

profusion of material on futility that a study of this feeling through the medium of literature would be a valuable addition to present knowledge of the subject.<sup>(40) (70) (86a)</sup>

A feeling of futility is sometimes experienced by an individual who identifies himself with, and by virtue of this fact, belongs to a certain group. Following World War I, certain young people of the day, products of that disillusioning period, called themselves "futilitarians." During the depression years of the early 1930's, young men and young women called themselves members of the "lost generation"<sup>(101)</sup> (a name revived on other occasions). At the beginning of World War II, boys said, "What is there ahead for us?" while girls questioned, "The boys are needed, but what can we possibly do? Will there ever be a chance for marriage?"<sup>5</sup> Adults also gave expression to this widespread feeling of futility in such statements as "Why should we have children? Nothing lies ahead for them."<sup>6</sup>

The accumulated evidence provides substance to the assumption that feeling futile is an experience common to many people, regardless of age, status, or occupation. It cannot be designated wholly as an expression of the neurotic or the mentally ill, unless one accepts Horney's thesis that the neurotic personality is the norm of our times. Cross sections of student groups and adults, who by all standards are functioning normally, have revealed expressions of this feeling. Such general material could not serve reasonably as the basis of a study of limited scope; it is too voluminous, as well as too formless.

To undertake a study of the problem of futility with a limited body of material seemed the more feasible plan. Case histories of fifty women college graduates offered a manageable amount of data on which to base a study. It was during the process of analyzing the histories for another investigation that expressions of futility were noted throughout.<sup>(11)</sup> These statements were the outward expression of feelings of hopelessness and formed the basis which stimulated the present study.

Early in this study the decision was made that any satisfactory

<sup>5</sup> Student group discussion at University of Alabama and University of South Carolina, 1941-42.

<sup>6</sup> Counseling interviews with parents, 1941-42.

understanding of the problem of futility must come from a study of the *total personality* expressing futility and not from fractional studies done on isolated factors. A statistical analysis of the life histories could yield only segmental bits of information. Since expressions of feeling represent the complexity of interaction of the individual with his environment, a study of fragments would be relatively meaningless.<sup>7</sup>

The changing emphasis of research in social sciences is shifting from the use of fragmentary methods to the recognition of an underlying unity and an attempt to develop methods which are directed toward this unity.<sup>(14)</sup> Research in these fields should be continued even though the tools of measurement are not exact. Observation can be improved to handle abstract concepts of social science.<sup>(15)</sup> It is a fact that no behavior "is relevant out of its context." Character formation must be studied in order to understand personality.<sup>(16)</sup> Current trends in the investigation of personality are shifting away from statistical studies toward the more fundamental in the psychology of personality.<sup>(100)</sup>

The life-history method provides a qualitative study of personality. By this means the total individual in his environment may be considered. The reliability and validity of the method are determined by the level of complexity at which the history is obtained.<sup>(16)</sup> Criteria for the life history can be set up in such a way as to strengthen its use in both cultural and psychoanalytic studies.<sup>(12)</sup>

Allport considers the case history the most complete method of studying personality, since it pulls together all objective as well as subjective data. His point of view is stated thus:

Briefly summarized the usefulness of the case study for the psychology of personality is as follows: (a) It furnishes an individual framework within which all relevant and significant data may be compiled and arranged, so that the investigator does not have on hand merely an embarrassing mass of scores and psychological debris that do not fit together. (b) It keeps attention always riveted upon a single concrete life—which is where the psychologist's attention should be riveted more often than it is. (c) By keeping the whole life in view, single acts and individual events can be more properly interpreted and

<sup>7</sup>Notes from Lawrence K. Frank.



evaluated by reference to their structural context. (d) By comparing many cases there may emerge evidence of common forms of response that leads to a fresh conceptualization regarding mind-in-general. New psychological generalizations thus evolved differ from most generalizations in that they are derived not from common segments of behavior viewed in isolation but from entire lives as they are actually lived, with all their intricate inter-relations fully exposed to view.<sup>(2)</sup>

Murray likens the case history to a picture puzzle in which many significant responses, as many puzzle pieces, must be examined in order to grasp a concept of the whole. When this idea of totality is gained, it is possible to reinterpret and understand the parts of which the whole is composed. He believes that "certain general intuitions about human nature" are more valuable than "devising tests to measure with precision things that have no influence on the course of life."<sup>(37)</sup>

The present study analyzes fifty life histories of women college graduates in an effort to illuminate the problem of expressed futility and to determine, if possible, the contributing factors and causes associated with such expressions. Could these feelings be attributed solely to conditions of the environment which presented insurmountable barriers to an individual? Were they due to deep-rooted cultural disjointedness which no amount of personal adjustment could overcome? Were they chiefly the expression of individual personality? Why did the woman use this particular method of meeting her problems rather than some more aggressive means of attack?

These histories revealed various expressions of futility representing a wide range of human experience. By casual reading, it was impossible to say what *caused* a sense of futility. One woman might refer to herself as being "just a wife and mother and contributing nothing to the world," while, in contrast, another might consider herself as doing the "most important job any woman could have—bringing up children."

Professional educators and others whose opinions were sought in the formulations of the study generally assumed that intelligent modern women felt futile because their housework was too monotonous and routine. Such an assumption accounts for only part of the picture. The problem is not so simple, for, as the investigation

proceeded, no one factor could be said to result always in a sense of futility. More basic reasons for futility must be found if the problem is to be understood. If women who are equipped with intelligence and education, which we consider among the best tools for living, experience such feelings, then finding a really effective means of preventing or correcting futility would be worth while.

The purpose of this study is to explore expressed futility in a group of women college graduates. An attempt will be made to determine by the analysis of fifty life histories the factors related to and associated with the arousal of these feelings.

## CHAPTER II

### *What Is Futility?*

Futility may be defined as the feeling a person has when he considers himself of no importance, ineffectual, useless, or hopelessly unable to produce any effect.<sup>(22) (80)</sup> One evidence of this feeling is the verbalized expression of a sense of futility.

An individual, when judged by objective standards, need not be or appear to be futile and ineffectual in order to experience a sense of futility. To feel futile indicates a mental attitude of resignation when, in the face of present circumstances or because of one's limitations, no additional effort seems warranted. Finding oneself unable to initiate further activity creates the feeling of being at "dead center."

A feeling of futility is one kind of emotional reaction to perceived failure. Such a feeling may be transitory, or it may indicate a basic attitude of the person. When one experiences frustration in achieving a desired goal, he may react in any one of a number of different ways. There is no assurance that a feeling of hopelessness will always result from frustration any more than that a sense of violence must inevitably follow. The individual personality which undergoes frustration establishes its own characteristic way of reacting when thwarted. This form of reaction is in accord with the meanings and values the person attaches to his experience. Experiencing a feeling of hopelessness may be peculiar to certain personality organization.

Whenever futility is expressed, it reveals something of the individual from whom it emanates. By means of expressed feelings and attitudes, as well as by behavior, one reveals the uniqueness of his personality, his individual style of life. Such evidence is consistent with and not irrelevant to the total structure of the individual. Expressions of futility not only indicate the attitude of the person

but may disclose other aspects of his personality. A feeling of hopelessness might indicate a brief or transitory reaction to unsatisfactory experiences; it might also be a part of a coherent personality structure which uses this as an habitual means of making adjustments; or it might reveal a characteristic way of reacting under given circumstances.

In order to understand futility as an expression of the individual, organization of personality will be considered briefly. Every person is unique. Each fashions his own characteristic structure as he makes his adaptation to life.

To begin with, *inheritance provides a fundamental structure which delimits the organization of each individual*. It is accepted that every infant at birth has certain native endowments. He inherits his body type, his pigmentation of hair, eyes, and skin, and other physical characteristics. To what extent his mental and emotional life is determined by inheritance cannot be accurately ascertained as yet. The answer must be somewhere between the point of view of extreme behaviorism which rules out inheritance except for physical structure<sup>(79)</sup> and the point of view of biological determinism.<sup>(2) (19) (35) (41)</sup>

Life takes on meanings for the individual as his unique personality pattern evolves. Meanings for him become attached early to the basic physiological needs and tensions common to all infants. Each organism is impelled to action in its effort to satisfy these urges. Life's earliest meanings result from the way in which such needs are met. The physiological tensions and irritabilities of infants are soon extended to more purposeful motivation;<sup>(1) (5) (78) (83)</sup> for these common motivations take on varied uses and meanings, depending upon the characteristic endowment of the individual and the peculiar circumstances of his environment. Basic urges differ decidedly from one person to another. Hence the drives themselves are unique in the motivation they supply for each individual. *Early needs and organic tensions of the very young child soon become channeled into drives which are characteristically and singularly his own.*<sup>(2) (57) (82)</sup>

As the personality develops it becomes evident that interaction of the organism with its environment is an important factor. *Cultural pressures have a marked effect on the structuring of each*

*individual personality.* These pressures operate from within the family, through the family, and from the community as well. Hence, each individual must constantly make adjustments to such pressures, be changed by them, or change them in so far as it is possible. From the beginning, personality gains both uniqueness and cultural typing from this continuous process of interaction between the individual and his environment. The effect of environmental pressures on him can be identified throughout the life of an individual, however much this interaction is limited by his own endowment. <sup>(12)(34)(61)(103)(109)(87)</sup>

There is also evidence that *certain "fixed" characteristics of personality seem to persist throughout the development of an individual.* It would seem that these characteristics function as a part of the personality "core." Modifiable traits and attitudes fluctuate about the more stable characteristics, and all are continually subjected to environmental pressures. Under recurring situations which embody definite meanings for each person, specific types of reactions develop and these eventually become established attitudes and habit patterns peculiar to the individual. <sup>(21)(66)</sup>

The study of any single personality reveals an organized cohesive structure. <sup>(29)(45)</sup> *Each individual's goals are consistent with his personality and give both cohesion and motivation to his total structure.* When the basic drives of infancy give way to more mature and purposeful motivation as the result of conditioning and through the substitution of new meanings, the personality gradually evolves goals and aspirations congruent with its structure. <sup>(34)(18)</sup> One *major or central goal* may serve as the radix of the organism to which all other desires and aspirations are subordinate, but a *major syndrome*, or group of goals, usually provides the basic core for the individual. Other aspirations subsidiary to the main goal or group, and consistent with the total personality, are also indicated. Ambivalence in goals is often found, but this ambivalence too is characteristic of the unique personality structure. <sup>(11)(31)</sup>

The point of view of the present study holds that *each individual personality is a unique organization of all its component parts, consisting of inherited factors, needs, traits, habits, and goals, which is in continuous dynamic interaction with its environment and*

which reveals characteristic behavior consistent with its structure. The purposes, goals, and aspirations which provide focus and motivation for the personality have evolved as an integral part of the structure and as a result of the cultural milieu in which it develops. As the growing organism finds or fails to find satisfaction, as it meets environmental situations, makes the necessary adjustments, or is changed by cultural pressures, and as its own limitations are accepted or rejected, new meanings become attached to life which continually help to shape and reshape the individual's goals and aspirations.<sup>(21)(31)(41)</sup>

Common goals are apparent among people, but their specific meanings and interpretations must be examined in order that the individual be recognized as unique and not a replica of other human beings or types. Goals and strivings may be considered in broad general classifications if one can accept characteristic modifications of these as producing individual behavior.

Illustrative of this concept is *happiness*, which can be described as a goal common to adults and the motivation of most human striving. The goal of happiness is given many varied interpretations by people, depending to a great extent upon their local or more general cultural milieu. Some expect to find this end through their own intrinsic qualities, while others look for it only from extrinsic values. Happiness is a common goal but it is achieved in many different ways. That which represents happiness for one may not for another; hence diverse experiences take on specific interpretations of the common goal, happiness.

Goals, "the direction finders" for individual lives, are both conscious and unconscious; they are driving, compelling, and inexorable in the motivation of human behavior unless other equally powerful goals consistent with the total behavior pattern are substituted for them. No life is undirected; no life is without motivational forces that serve as the foci for its unique personality organization that is in continual interaction with its particular environment. When a goal is thwarted, substitution must be made in the goal or the means of achieving the goal, but every goal must be congruent with the individual's own life pattern.<sup>(2)(50)(57)</sup>

Exactly how a person develops his style of life is subject to conjecture and speculation; that he has a style peculiarly his own

is undeniable. Theories and hypotheses vary in explanations of the origin of a life mode; but this study is concerned only with the importance of the individual's style as an integral part of personality. The statement can be made here that *each individual has a characteristic way or manner of doing things and to achieve his goals he uses means and techniques peculiarly his own*. These means have evolved for him, as is indicated in the preceding discussion. He employs his particular ways and means because they seem right for him. The techniques he uses have worked and are consistent with his personality. Thus the uniqueness of personality is evident not only in the particular goals an individual seeks but in the means utilized for achieving his desired ends.<sup>(11)(12)(16)(17)</sup>

In seeking his goals the individual has daily experiences as the media through which he channels his strivings. Life goals and aspirations, although often vague and formless in themselves, must find expression in practical realities. Through his daily life experiences an individual has opportunities for satisfying or not satisfying his major goals.<sup>(13)(16)(17)</sup> These experiences include those with himself, his family, his social group, his vocation, his recreation, the community, and innumerable other aspects of life. One person marries and has children; another does not. The first seeks to satisfy his goals in marriage and in his family as well as through all his other experiences; the second must also satisfy his goals but he cannot do so through the channel of marriage since this is not among his experiences. One individual meets periodic crises that deal crushing blows; another leads a tranquil, peaceful existence with scarcely any external disturbances. Each tries to satisfy his needs through the channels of his own life experience. He is always a part of his environment; his life experience is continuous.

In viewing personality development, the picture is not one of smooth-flowing and untroubled interchange between the organism and its environment. Drives cannot always be satisfied; needs are thwarted continually; and strivings toward certain goals fail repeatedly. Every individual must meet again and again what he perceives to be failure. He finds himself from time to time unable to attain his goals through daily experiences; his techniques prove unsuccessful in achieving highly desired ends. He becomes

blocked in his efforts and as a result he is frustrated. *Repeated thwartings in daily experience represent frustration of goals and aspirations.*<sup>(9)(18)(29)</sup>

A variety of research has been done in an effort to understand frustration, its causes and results. The study by Dollard and associates is in line with the frustration-aggression hypothesis advanced by Freud and others. The basic postulate of Dollard's study is that aggression is always a consequence of frustration. Daily observation gives ample evidence of this. His study also points out that frustration always leads to some form of aggression. This last assumption is based on less observable evidence than the former. Although people may appear to accept and readjust to frustration, according to Dollard, this very act of repression is aggression turned in on the self. Hence, if interpreted in this way, frustration leads to aggression and aggression always results from frustration.<sup>(13)(19)</sup>

The present study is concerned primarily with that result of frustration which is a *sense of futility*. To feel futile indicates a state of hopelessness over making further effort to gain desired goals. To feel hopeless may mean submitting to or accepting the inevitability of a frustrating experience; it may mean feeling the uselessness or the futility of further effort. We can assume that when *frustrated in achieving certain of his life goals, because of thwarted experiences of daily living, an individual may react with a feeling of futility.*

The evidence of the present study would be in substantial accord with Dollard's hypothesis if that concept of aggression were broad enough to include feelings of futility as indications of the internal direction of aggression. Tensions increase when goals are sought and drives or needs are to be satisfied. When something interferes with or blocks the effort to satisfy desires, frustration results and some form of release other than that originally sought must be substituted. A feeling of futility is one substitution.

According to Freud's frustration-aggression hypothesis, the individual when frustrated in libidinal drive substitutes or sublimates his behavior. Repeated thwarting in his basic pleasure-seeking and pain-avoidance leads to hostility. Neuroses grow out of frustration of one's libidinal urges.<sup>(19)(21)</sup> But Horney does not agree wholly with Freud's theory of frustration. There is refuting evidence to



this, namely, that healthy children can endure much frustration without a reaction of hostility. Neurotic anxiety cannot be attributed solely to frustration but rather to conflicting trends within the personality.<sup>(101)</sup>

Other frustration hypotheses indicate that it is both internal and external. Frustration may be due to privation, deprivation, and conflict,<sup>(104)</sup> and it may result from conflict between the urge to achieve original goals and the urge to avoid frustrating experiences. Again one may assume that frustration is accompanied by physiological tensions which are emotional in nature. Physiological tensions resulting from frustration are motivational but not directive in action. Unstable people react more violently to frustration than stable ones do.<sup>(100)</sup> Neuroses which result from frustration can make permanent changes in the personality.<sup>(94)</sup>

Reactions which are both *successful* and *unsuccessful* can follow frustration. Successful reactions are indicated by the use of effort to overcome the obstacle and by deflection to avoid the obstacle. Unsuccessful reactions to frustration appear to be an exaggeration of attempts to overcome the obstacle when it is evident that success is scarcely possible. Another reaction to frustration is indicated when one continues to struggle against an obstacle, *refusing to recognize that the struggle is futile*. When one persists in such an effort the struggle has already ceased to be a means toward achievement of the original goal. These futile struggles have been termed "neurotic substitution for a goal."<sup>(100)</sup>

In criticism of the Dollard frustration-aggression hypothesis it is proposed that a variety of effects may be evident instead of only the one reaction to frustration. Some of the probable reactions to frustration are: (1) imagining or daydreaming, (2) substitution or sublimation, (3) delusion (confusion of imagination), (4) devaluation, (5) detachment (sense of humor), (6) resignation, and (7) aggression.<sup>(95)</sup>

Individual psychology attributes the futility reaction in frustration to mistaken meanings about life and the individual's own feeling of weakness. The following excerpt gives one description of futility: "But suppose an individual is discouraged; suppose he cannot conceive that if he makes realistic efforts he will improve the situation. He will still be unable to bear his feelings of inferior-

ity; he will still struggle to get rid of them; but he will try methods which bring him no farther ahead."<sup>(1)</sup>

Karen Horney points out the reaction of desolation to frustrated wishes and the tendency to give up or restrict goals and to withdraw interest because of a dread of failure.<sup>(33)</sup>

From literature in general and psychological studies in particular, it seems that futility is related to and associated with many factors. Women are just beginning to realize that they seldom achieve all that they desire in work, love, politics, and religion. Perhaps men have accepted their failure to achieve these desires for some time. Frustration of deep human longing for lasting love and security brings a sense of disillusionment, a feeling of futility.<sup>(4)</sup> In the history of feminine disillusionment increasing sex liberty and freedom for women may have helped to further this feeling. Some believe that women have gained independence and social freedom, but at the same time have lost something important in their influence on the home. There seems little hope of substituting anything equally satisfying for this gain.<sup>(3)</sup> The shifting role of women in the culture and their increased freedom today indicates a period of transition in which many of the old values are failing for women. Unless they see something positive in work outside the home, or re-establish something of real value within the home, there is little hope of anything but failure.<sup>(112)(13)</sup>

Another factor associated with futility is the static nature of member roles in the family. These form early and are apt to set up a pattern of role relationships which does not always adapt easily to inevitable family change.<sup>(49)</sup> The dominance-submission syndrome of woman is also related to feelings of futility. Motivated by a need to dominate, the woman must face failure in this many times. The traits of submission may be more easily satisfied but they, too, produce feelings of withdrawal, inadequacy, and failure to succeed.<sup>(101)</sup>

Recent studies have vigorously stressed the importance of sexual adjustment. When the individual does not achieve a satisfactory degree of adjustment with regard to sex, frustration produces a variety of reactions, one of which may be a sense of hopelessness. Research done by Dickenson and Beam and others bear out this point.<sup>(10)(6)(26)</sup>

Other factors have been suggested as related to futility: unpre-

paredness for psychological adjustment with the partner in marriage; inability to attain the attractive goods that are advertised; identification of frustrated ambitions with the failures of children (especially when the family is small); and loss of youth, which means that the woman's chief function, childbearing, has ceased.<sup>(38)</sup> After marriage and childbearing the woman may recognize that she has had nearly all of the major life experiences which she had anticipated. She may feel that no additional frontiers lie ahead in which to find the deep human personal satisfactions which are sought by everyone.

The decline of religion as a critical force in the lives of people today also results in feelings of hopelessness. The protection and source of security it has offered in the past no longer seem to exist for many, and few have substituted anything in its place.

It has long been recognized that any crisis is apt to result in feelings of hopelessness. The economic depression of the 1930's was one of those critical times which brought about marked feelings of futility for many people, while for others it developed new values instead. The war provided another general crisis situation that was linked with feelings of futility. Personal and family crises, such as death, prolonged illness, disgrace, and financial loss, often result in feelings of hopelessness which may or may not be the most satisfactory or effective attitude to take in accepting such experiences.

Breakdowns in cultural patterns leave many women without direction or the techniques for doing anything satisfying without them. No longer are the "do's" and "don'ts" of society operating with unquestioned authority.

It is unnecessary and impossible to consider all the causal factors related to futility, but the above are among the significant ones. They indicate not only some of the major social problems of the day but the areas of general frustration about which awareness has developed.

One striking manifestation of futility is the recurrence of suicide and suicidal threats. Although suicide may be accepted as aggressive reaction turned inward, it actually represents a variety of attitudes. For some it can be the ultimate in self-realization; for others the ultimate in futility. The motivation of this behavior can

be attributed to a number of reactions, one of which is of interest here: "That a breakdown of idealization or disappointment in beloved people results in the feeling that if nothing good remains in the world then life could not be worth living."<sup>(107)</sup> Excessive feelings of disgust do not always result in the overt act of suicide, but they are manifestations of the attitude of hopelessness. Some studies reveal suicide as the extreme expression of futility and the effect of cumulative hopelessness.<sup>(118)</sup>

Inevitable thwartings in daily experience bring about frustration of major life goals. This results in different forms of reaction, one of which is a feeling of hopelessness. Just why a sense of futility occurs instead of vigorous aggressive attack, escape into fantasy, or any one of several other reactions is the problem on which this study is focused. Undoubtedly there must be some factor or factors which can be associated with frustration when a sense of hopelessness is the reaction produced. In spite of frequent speculation as to a single cause for this reaction, the studies in the field indicate that a wide variety of factors are associated with feelings of futility.

Why does futility occur? Can it be attributed solely to one primary cause or to any one specific reason? Why is frustration followed by a feeling of hopelessness rather than by some other reaction? In an attempt to answer these questions the major hypothesis of this study can be studied.

Based on evidence accumulated, *the assumption is now made that no one factor in any experience area in which frustration occurs can be the cause of or inevitably result in feelings of futility, but that a sense of futility occurs when an individual seems unable to modify his major life goals or to adjust his methods of achieving these goals even after repeated frustration in trying to satisfy his desired ends.*

To prove this hypothesis may be impossible. This study concerns itself with exploration of the problem of feeling futile as an expression of personality, and with the factors associated with such feelings in one particular group of women. The evidence of futility in the life histories of fifty women college graduates will be examined. The data are to be analyzed for the existence of futility and for the determination of factors related to it. In the following

chapters, the material from fifty life histories is used to illuminate the problem under consideration.

Based on the analyzed data from these histories, the major hypotheses may be supported or disproved, and additional assumptions stated. Implications for education will be pointed out as the result of findings from the study.

## CHAPTER III

### *Description of Population: Fifty Women College Graduates*

Each of the fifty women chosen for the study actually expressed feelings of futility. Their histories were selected because of these expressions. Yet by no objective standard could these women be judged futile or ineffectual.

Such women as these, representative of persons with a college background, can be seen in nearly every community. They dress well and, on the whole, make an attractive appearance. One might meet them in sorority groups, college clubs, and alumnae associations, actively participating or merely attending. Their activities extend to club work of various kinds, including the Parent-Teacher Association, League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women, peace organizations, church groups, women's clubs, volunteer work in social agencies, board memberships, and similar educational, civic, and social undertakings. These young women, having been privileged to graduate from college, now functioned as might be expected, fulfilling their responsibilities to varying degrees in family and social life, jobs, and community participation.

From every indication, the friends and associates of these women considered them average, or above average. Such evidence as casual remarks, observations, official and semi-official reports (medical, job, club, etc.) was taken into account. At no time did comments or observations by others typify the women as peculiar or queer.

The fifty histories chosen for the present study were part of an earlier investigation which included one hundred college women, living in a metropolitan area, who consented to cooperate in a proposed study of women and the effectiveness of their educa-

ments and were asked to cooperate in the study did not comply and one woman withdrew after two interviews, only one complete history was withdrawn.<sup>(19)</sup>

The composition of the original group studied was as follows:

In birthplace, the women represented all sections of the country, but more than three fourths came from the Middle West. More than half came from cities having a population of 50,000 or more. About three fourths were of native-born parentage and of Protestant faith. The group were chiefly in their early thirties, with an age range from twenty to fifty. Some were still single, but most were married and in the beginning of the childbearing and child-rearing period of life.

The economic status of the group was relatively high, the family income ranging from \$1,200 to \$50,000 and the median being \$3,800 for the women's college graduates. Both in their parental families and in their own, the graduates of women's colleges tended toward a higher income level. Both groups tended to marry into the economic group to which they belonged before attending college—the coeducational group to marry men in educational and professional fields and the women's college graduates to marry noncollege men in business.

The women were superior mentally, as shown by their scores on the Detroit Advanced Intelligence Test. Sixty percent of the group had better than average adjustment, according to the Thurstone Personality Schedule; 86 individuals had scores indicating average or better than average adjustment, while 14 had scores indicating poor adjustment.

The Bernreuter Personality Inventory ratings show that 91 percent had better than average emotional balance and tended to be independent and unlikely to seek advice often, and a majority tended to be extroverted and dominant in their dealings with others. The personality traits of the subjects revealed during interviews agree fairly well with the results of the Bernreuter Schedule.<sup>(20)</sup>

The validity of the original study may be judged from the following:

From among the first 330 women who came to the service, 80 percent of the research group were selected. Selection was made without regard to the problem presented, since the study was planned to discover, not to select, the problems of college women. The remaining 20 percent were recruited from a random sampling of every fiftieth card taken from a compilation of the names of 6,000 college women; it was hoped that this sampling would supply a control group. However, only twenty of those contacted were sufficiently interested to give their complete histories and most of their records were not as full as those

since most of their material was completed before their marriage they were considered as single for the purpose of the study.<sup>(18)</sup>

Data for the one hundred life histories were collected chiefly by means of personal interviews held either in the woman's home or at the Service Office. All available material, such as letters, reports, tests, and contacts with relatives, which might add to the history were accumulated. The range of time for collecting the data varied from one to three years, depending upon the individual. The number of interviews also varied with the individual. The interviews averaged two hours, as this seemed the best length of time for obtaining information without causing fatigue. For some histories the major portion of the data was collected within six months by means of weekly or biweekly visits, but contact with the woman was kept for at least a year by means of several follow-up interviews. When the history-taking extended over two or three years, visits were scheduled less often.

Each woman understood from the start that the interviews were to be private and that the material given would be treated anonymously. Usually rapport with the interviewer was established in the first few contacts, but for some of the women a period of anxiety, or even suspicion, persisted throughout the early interviews. Ultimately full cooperation was established or the history was eliminated. The material taken at each interview varied in amount either because of the type of information given, the verbosity of the woman, or her deviation from the subject under consideration.

A working committee<sup>1</sup> formulated the framework for collecting data on this group of selected women. Those who served as consultants for the study also helped to organize this framework into the form of a comprehensive developmental chart which set forth the various stages of a woman's life. The types of experiences which could be most usually anticipated for women at those different stages, the impingement of environmental influences upon them, their relationships with parents, siblings, and friends, the opportunities for attaching meanings to life, and the chances for evolving goals, aspirations, and ego ideals were integrated into this basic chart. From the chart an outline was drawn to serve as a

<sup>1</sup> Committee from staff of Merrill-Palmer School, Detroit.



of the women who offered their cooperation without solicitation. Moreover, the service realized that such selective factors as conscientiousness and recognizing an opportunity for help with their problems operated fully as much with these women as with the original group and that accordingly they could not be considered a legitimate control group.

At the outset the project was subjected to criticism on the ground that the women selected for study must inevitably be a problem group, since they were selected from a service clientele, and that even the offer of those who ostensibly came primarily to cooperate was open to suspicion, since such an offer might be a "cover-up" for an unstated problem.

This criticism was doubtless valid in certain cases, but for several reasons the investigators are convinced that the subjects cannot justifiably be described as a problem group. In our opinion a request for routine services of the school, such as registration of a child for the Nursery School or intelligence testing, is more likely to indicate an intelligent mother attempting to utilize the best educational advantages available for her children than a woman seeking an excuse to get help with her own problems. Many of the women demonstrated by their remarks and attitudes that they would not have gone to a service set up expressly to deal with personal problems. Again, many were genuinely interested in education and were grateful for an opportunity to participate in an educational project and to be in touch with an educational institution.

For some women the experience satisfied a social need, in addition to any service that might be given them. The newcomer to the city found it a means of social contact and of making new acquaintances, and women who were unable to spend anything on recreation during the worst of the depression years welcomed the interviews as a social experience for which they made a return in contributing their histories.

It should be pointed out, however, that the single women included in the study are not as representative of single women college graduates in general as the married ones are of their group; the married ones, though superior in intelligence and socio-economic status, seem to be really representative of married college women in general. Though the Advisory Service had among its clients single women from many professional and business fields, there is no broad representation of these fields among the women who cooperated in the study. This lack can be explained satisfactorily by the time factor alone. Some women usually lead lives so active vocationally, socially and personally that they cannot spare the hours necessary for such a study. No doubt, also, single women were not on the whole as attracted as married women to the kind of service available in return for their cooperation.

During the course of the study six of the single women married, but

since most of their material was completed before their marriage they were considered as single for the purpose of the study.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Committee from staff of Merrill-Palmer School, Detroit.

come to the interview so filled with immediate happenings in her life that the entire interview would be taken up with recounting them.

Occasionally, when finishing her discussion for the day, the woman might say hesitantly, "I think maybe I will tell you this." She would then open up some area of her experience which had been suggested by a part of the earlier discussion but which she had not revealed.

Although the major part of every history was given consistently to one interviewer, each woman was interviewed by at least one other person on the staff, the medical examiner, and sometimes by others. The number of interviewers was determined by the variety of service which each woman requested or by her greater feeling of ease with certain staff members than with those with whom she began her interview. It was made easy for the women to change interviewers when they desired to do so. Careful, written records were kept of every interview.

Since help with their problems was offered to the women at the outset of the study, counseling service was provided whenever it was requested. Sometimes this help meant referral to other resources. Again, it required the giving of a long and continuous program of guidance by the staff. All material from the interviews was incorporated in the life history of each of the one hundred women who were chosen for the study.

#### CRITERIA OF SELECTION OF THE FIFTY HISTORIES OF PRESENT STUDY

Of the one hundred original histories, fifty were used for the present study. Being fully aware of the magnitude of the available data, the investigator realized that it would be necessary to limit the number of histories used in this study. Fifty cases seemed to constitute a more reasonable amount of data for one person to analyze than one hundred, and at the same time to allow a sufficient number of persons from whose histories defensible hypotheses might be drawn.

Since the problem chosen for this investigation dealt with expressed feelings of futility and associated factors, the first criterion

of selection was *that a sense of futility be expressed in every history used in the study*. Verbalized expressions of futility were concrete evidence that such feelings existed, and since the histories were limited to fifty as a usable amount of data, the presence of these verbalizations became the first criterion of selection.

In seeking every means of shedding light on this problem, the woman's own statements of futility were taken as the first indications that she felt futile. If no expressions of this kind were found in a history, it was impossible to conclude whether or not the woman actually experienced a sense of futility. Since the histories were completed by the time this study was started it became impossible to ascertain such information, nor was it essential to the study.

Fifteen of the one hundred life histories were not available for use. Of the remaining eighty-five, seventy-eight expressed verbalized feelings of futility, thus eliminating seven.

At the close of the original investigation fifteen of the histories were taken for use by others of the staff, hence accessibility to all data was not possible for this study. These fifteen histories did not differ from the other eighty-five in any particular aspect, in so far as the investigator knows, except that possibly they were less complete than those used here. This distribution occurred prior to the assembling of material for the present study.

In order to have as many comparable factors as possible, the second criterion of selection was *that every woman studied should have been out of college at least three years*. Seventy-three of the women met this criterion. Five were eliminated because of too recent graduation from college. Several in the original study had so recently graduated from college that their experience was not comparable to that of the other women.

The third criterion was *that the women should be within a limited age span*. Some women among the original group of 100 had graduated later in life than the rest. Age placed them in the forty-to-fifty-year bracket, which brought in factors not comparable to those in this group. The women selected for this study were in an age group from twenty to forty-nine. Seventy histories met this criterion. Three of the women were past fifty, and were therefore eliminated.

The fourth criterion of selection was *that every history used should be full and complete*. As stated in the Preface, the histories varied in length and completeness. In an effort to understand as well as possible the problem of futility and the related factors, complete life histories were necessary. Any case that did not fully explore practically every phase of the woman's life was ruled out for use in this study. Fifty of the histories were judged complete. Twenty did not meet this criterion.

Any fifty of the one hundred life histories might have been used for this study, but the ones chosen resulted from application of the criteria described. Fifteen of the histories were not available. In selecting from the remaining eighty-five the histories to be used, seven failed to meet the criterion of verbalized feelings of futility, five revealed insufficient experience since college graduation, three indicated the women were beyond the age limit of the group, and twenty were judged incomplete.

#### ORIGINAL STUDY OF COLLEGE WOMEN'S PROBLEMS

The one hundred life histories used in the original study amounted to volumes, for they averaged 66,650 words per history. The time of collecting the data for each history varied from one to three years, depending upon the individual. Each single interview lasted on an average two hours. All of the data which could be accumulated on a woman, including background history, development, and present status, were brought together in order to understand her, her problems and the use she made of her education.<sup>(18)</sup>

Using these criteria as a basis of selection, fifty case histories were chosen for the study and the following data were compiled. Median age of the fifty women was 30.1. Forty of them were married, one was divorced, and nine were single. Of the married women, thirty-one, or 77.5 percent, had children; two, or 5.0 percent, had adopted children. The median score for the group on the Detroit Advanced Intelligence Test was 165 (the 75th percentile for college graduates on this test was a score of 149). Husbands of the women had a median income of \$2,880. The median income of the single woman was \$1,402. Results from the Bernreuter Inventory, Thurstone Personality Schedule, and Vernon-

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Allport Values Profile showed the average adjustment of the group.<sup>(186c,d)</sup>

The fifty women studied seemed to be leading lives of average normal women, from all indications functioning satisfactorily as active and able persons. Observations of them over a period of time in no way indicated a group of bleak, frustrated lives. But in spite of being above average in appearance, intellectual ability, accomplishment, socio-economic status, income, and objectively measured emotional stability, *they expressed futility.*



## CHAPTER IV

### *Method for Determining Presence of Futility*

To find some method of analyzing fifty life histories for evidence of futility and at the same time avoid oversimplifying or fractionalizing the available data presented the next problem. No precisely constructed measurement seemed possible as case histories derive their value from the totality or configuration which they present and not from measurable isolated factors as found in more objective tests and situations. However, when common elements are present, some means of recognizing and examining them should be set up.

Collection of the original data proceeded with no thought of seeking information on the problem of futility. As has already been stated, the investigator became aware of the existence of futility among the women only while reading the completed histories of an earlier study.<sup>(18)</sup>

From the outset the investigator planned four steps for the analysis: (1) selecting histories; (2) finding elements common to all of them; (3) examining each individual case for its characteristic configuration; and (4) basing assumptions and conclusions on findings yielded. The analysis proceeded accordingly.

For the first step in case selection, each of the fifty histories was read through for evidence of feelings of futility. Such indications were actual statements expressing futility. When these statements were found in a history and the other criteria were met (Chapter III), the history was then incorporated in the study. If no statements were present, the case was rejected, regardless of other evidence that might indicate futility. Although seven of the histories read for this study did not reveal actual expressions, to assume from

the absence of verbalization on this point that a sense of futility did not exist would be misleading. When the data were collected, questions to elicit information on futility had not been asked, and many women confined themselves almost entirely to the questions under consideration; therefore futility was not necessarily revealed, even had it been experienced.

It should be borne in mind that this investigation is concerned with studying those who experience a sense of futility, and not in determining why some persons have such feelings and others do not. As the study is one of futility and the factors contributing to or associated with it, the data chosen for examination show actual *evidence of futility*.

The statements of futility which were accepted applied to the women themselves and to the situations of which they were a part. "My position is hopeless" and "I feel so futile" were both taken as evidence of futility. If, however, a statement indicated that the woman was not identified with the person or situation referred to or that she had projected the problem outside herself, it was not retained as an expression of futility. For instance: "He is simply hopeless" was rejected, while "I feel hopeless about my husband" was retained as evidence of her own futility; or the statement "The job is impossible" was not used, unless the context indicated that it was an expression of the woman's sense of futility within herself.

As each woman contributed her history she revealed her feeling tones, and expressed herself characteristically. One might use the exact words, "I feel so futile," while another would say little, but indicate her feelings no less surely by a gesture with her hands, a shrug of her shoulders, or a general air of dejection. All such indications were recorded as data for the problem to be studied.

Each case used in this study shows at least *two statements* of futility. The range is from two to twenty-seven statements per subject. To be classified as an expression of futility, a statement had to include some of the following phrases and sentences, or ones similar to these taken from the histories:

"... impossible for me"; "... have never had a chance"; "... will never be able to"; "... my situation is hopeless"; "... lost hope"; "... never expect anything so ... never disappointed"; "... can accomplish nothing"; "... do not believe anything can be done"; "... completely discouraged"; "... cannot do anything"; "... will have to accept it"; "... expect nothing"; "... disillusioned"; "... all scrapped"; "... last possibility gone"; "... not justified in continuing"; "... my class of women ... social ... parasites"; "... ineffectual ... purposeless"; "... no future ahead for me"; "... to commit suicide"; "... never able to do what I want"; "... nothing to live for"; "... never get anything finished"; "... have slipped by me"; "... everything is wrong"; "... life is such a tangle"; "... my life is a muddle"; "... life is so futile"; "... life holds nothing"; "... like a squirrel in a cage I go on"; "... completely ineffectual"; "... I do not know which way to go"; "... feel desperately the need of"; "... will never be any better"; "... nothing else left to do"; "... am impossible"; "... would never be able to"; "... for people like me"; "... am incapable of measuring up"; "... have never been and never expect to be"; "... my outlook is bleak"; "... feel baffled"; "... everything has failed"; "... it is not worth the effort"; "... at a loss"; "... bump on a log"; "... am just that way"; "... hard to overcome"; "... feel starved for opportunities"; "... do not know where to turn"; "... cannot live a complete life"; "... felt simply doomed"; "... going to nothing"; "... am just chasing things around"; "... utterly helpless"; "... my card house has blown down. . . ."

This collection of phrases, which could be increased indefinitely, is taken out of context in order that the phrase alone might be judged.

Besides the above, many of the sentences when considered as a whole expressed futility, although the precise words themselves did not. Such words as "inevitable," "completely," "very," "just," "impossible," "never," in certain context, expressed a feeling of futility. "I just spend the day getting meals" and "To do all my work and care for the baby is impossible" are examples of these.

Some of the statements expressing futility contained qualifying words which prevented them from indicating hopelessness. These statements were ultimately included as evidence of futility in each history but were not used in the selection of cases. Examples are:

the absence of verbalization on this point that a sense of futility did not exist would be misleading. When the data were collected, questions to elicit information on futility had not been asked, and many women confined themselves almost entirely to the questions under consideration; therefore futility was not necessarily revealed, even had it been experienced.

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"... am not doing anything worth while"; "... cannot cope with this"; "... feel I can no longer go on"; "... could not bear it";

"... impossible for me"; "... have never had a chance"; "... will never be able to"; "... my situation is hopeless"; "... lost hope"; "... never expect anything so ... never disappointed"; "... can accomplish nothing"; "... do not believe anything can be done"; "... completely discouraged"; "... cannot do anything"; "... will have to accept it"; "... expect nothing"; "... disillusioned"; "... all scrapped"; "... last possibility gone"; "... not justified in continuing"; "... my class of women ... social ... parasites"; "... ineffectual ... purposeless"; "... no future ahead for me"; "... to commit suicide"; "... never able to do what I want"; "... nothing to live for"; "... never get anything finished"; "... have slipped by me"; "... everything is wrong"; "... life is such a tangle"; "... my life is a muddle"; "... life is so futile"; "... life holds nothing"; "... like a squirrel in a cage I go on"; "... completely ineffectual"; "... I do not know which way to go"; "... feel desperately the need of"; "... will never be any better"; "... nothing else left to do"; "... am impossible"; "... would never be able to"; "... for people like me"; "... am incapable of measuring up"; "... have never been and never expect to be"; "... my outlook is bleak"; "... feel baffled"; "... everything has failed"; "... it is not worth the effort"; "... at a loss"; "... bump on a log"; "... am just that way"; "... hard to overcome"; "... feel starved for opportunities"; "... do not know where to turn"; "... cannot live a complete life"; "... felt simply doomed"; "... going to nothing"; "... am just chasing things around"; "... utterly helpless"; "... my card house has blown down. ..."

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Some of the statements expressing futility contained qualifying words which prevented them from indicating hopelessness. These statements were ultimately included as evidence of futility in each history but were not used in the selection of cases. Examples are:

"This situation is almost impossible to meet." "I am not much of a good citizen."

After choosing the women for study on the basis of an *expressed sense of futility*, the cases were read a second time and marked for all other evidences of this feeling. Any descriptive statements made by the interviewer with regard to the woman's behavior, attitude, mannerisms, and appearance which conveyed the idea of futility were marked. Typical of these descriptive statements would be such references as the following:

She appeared apathetic and dejected.

She looked very weary and discouraged. There was none of the buoyancy and challenge she showed in her last visit.

She wept when talking about the possibility of not becoming pregnant.

In telling of her various efforts to break up this habit (child's masturbating), the client spoke in tones of desperation, as though she had tried everything without success.

Wearily she met the interviewer at the door. The puppy jumped all over them and the baby shouted with glee. The mother said: "It is a good idea to have a pet but to try and train a nineteen-months-old baby and a puppy at the same time in a small apartment is hopeless." The entire visit was spent in futile efforts by the mother to distract first the baby and then the pup.

Further evidence of futility came from occasional interpretations or references made by the interviewer in recording the case material:

She seemed to feel defeated and overcome by the drudgery of housework.

She seems to feel unable to stand parental domination any longer. She blames her husband for not taking her away [from her parents' home].

#### STATEMENTS OF FUTILITY CLASSIFIED

The statements of futility varied decidedly in contextual meaning. For example, the following expressions differ in ideas although they bear a similar wording:

*"It is hopeless. I will never really have a love affair."*

*"The baby cried . . . I feared changing her schedule . . . I was unhappy . . . We moved . . . Only a part of the furniture arrived . . . Some of the baby's equipment was missing . . . Then the spring fell and the baby fell to the floor. Everything seemed hopeless."*

*"It seems so hopeless. I want to do something that justifies living."*

Three women made the above statements. All used similar phrases to express feelings, but with variations in meaning and experience. The first woman clearly expressed frustration of a goal or basic drive which she expressed in certain life experience. This young woman was single and thirty. Her history shows that she strove constantly toward marriage. Having few dates and practically no men friends, and limited social experience, she felt that she would never achieve her desire. This statement of futility reflected her reaction to a *frustrated goal*, expressed in terms of a specified area of living.

The second illustration indicated a temporary but thwarting experience centering about homemaking. It is the kind of experience that can occur as a more or less isolated incident, or as a part of a pattern. In this instance, it happened that the woman's house-keeping skills were inadequate. She had no cooperation from her husband, even though she too held a full-time job. Her statement does not indicate necessarily the frustration of basic drives, although that is possible. But her sense of futility is expressed within a *specified area of experience*.

The third young woman expressed futility about *life in general*. Her frustration appeared so intense that living itself did not seem justified. Her statement was not motivated by any one thwarted goal or area of experience but resulted from a combination of many things. A failing marriage, poor health, low family income, and frustration of some or her most important goals were among the factors that could be associated with the expression that life was hopeless for her.

Recognition of these variations in statements of futility made necessary some system of classification.

During the second reading of the case and as each expression of *futility* was noted, marked, and classified, every statement was

considered in context. As has already been noted, isolated statements meant very little; therefore all factors associated with the expressions were given consideration.

The statements or expressions of futility were classified as follows:

1. *Expressions of futility centering about frustrated life goals.*
2. *Futility expressed over different areas of experience.*
3. *Statements of futility made about life in general (which usually combine 1 and 2).*

### *Life Goals*

The third reading of each case, which focused on meanings in the history, revealed certain predominant life goals or syndromes of goals. In some cases, these stood out as persistent, clear-cut, and definite, while in others they seemed more confused and ambivalent, but evident nonetheless. Obviously, basic drives of the human organism motivated these women, but the concrete meanings and interpretations which they gave to their drives transformed these into their own personal life goals. For most of the women, a *grouping of major life goals* seemed to predominate, with certain secondary goals related to them. In a few instances, the woman appeared to have one major controlling goal, one ruling passion.

Although the purposeful strivings of each woman were characteristic of her as an individual, as other histories were read similar goal-patterns appeared. This repetition of major and secondary goals from case to case made possible a general classification of common life goals, although one in no sense discrete. No one woman's pattern exactly resembled another's, but goals common to different histories could be identified.

Reading and analyzing the fifty life histories yielded twenty-three personal-social life goals. These were not preconceived but during the case reading appeared as important and frequently recurring goals.

Each case was examined for evidence of the woman's strivings and life ambitions. Then all previously marked expressions of futility, together with the woman's major life goal or goals, were studied. Whenever the statement of futility actually expressed the



woman's reaction to a frustrated goal or was closely allied with situations where her thwartings were obvious, it was classified accordingly. An illustration of this is found in the case of the young woman who said, "It is hopeless. I'll never really have a love affair." Repeated statements throughout her history indicated both the social importance to her of marriage and the personal need to be admired.

The following twenty-three personal-social goals predominated among the women as major life objectives. The statements<sup>1</sup> accompanying them are given as illustrations of the futility expressed in connection with the frustration of these goals:

1. *To dominate, control, manage, or manipulate others in the environment.*

"I know I am helpless to handle this [mother-in-law's control of her servant] when I thought I had things well in hand."

2. *To maintain peace and avoid friction by every possible means.*

"I don't think I should have to put up with this [servants' cantankerous attitudes] but since they are Mother's servants I guess there is nothing to do about it except maintain peace. These summers [spent at Mother's] are perfect nightmares."

3. *To be dominated or controlled by others.*

"When somebody else provides the motivation, I can do things, but I am just no good on my own."

4. *To submit to or follow authority of parents or parent substitutes.*

"I want to get help from my family but I can't. They just won't talk with me about the situation." [divorce]

5. *To resist or break from control of others.*

"I have always been under the supervision of my parents and probably always will be."

6. *To remain herself—an individual inviolate.*

"I feel there is nothing else to do but give up a part of yourself in marriage."

<sup>1</sup> Illustrations taken from fifty histories of this study.

7. *To live primarily for self—gratifying own desires.*

"I fear most not realizing my own possibilities." [Showed considerable emotion]

8. *To seek admiration and adulation.*

"What can be done for people like me? In getting older I am losing my attraction for masculine admiration and it means so much to me." [Age thirty]

9. *To live life excitedly.*

"I'll get all out of life possible as I won't live beyond forty."

10. *To cling to security.*

"I cannot see leaving the secure for insecurity of divorce. I am just a coward."

11. *To plan a constructive way of life—to have a conscious philosophy and to try to follow it.*

"Like a squirrel in a cage, my mind has gone around trying to find some way in which I could return and continue my responsibility." [Letter]

12. *To succeed, excel, or get ahead in competition.*

"I have always been so ambitious that it irritates me when I get into a situation where I feel I can't get any good from it."

13. *To conform to social opinion and expectation.*

"I am greatly disturbed when I know the neighbors gossip about me. I am afraid I can never get over that."

14. *To attain marital status.*

"I do not believe I will ever be able to marry."

15. *To experience parenthood.*

"I could not see why others should be able to have babies and I should not."

16. *To achieve success as a wife.*

"My husband is always wanting me to do more things at home than I am physically capable of doing. I just cannot manage it all."

17. *To be a good and successful mother.*

"I don't think I am the good mother I ought to be. I find everything hopelessly on top of me [with one child] while my neighbor with five children seems to manage well."

18. *To be socially prominent or important.*

"I can't do anything about the difference between my ideals and standards and those of my acquaintances who hold such false ambition and struggle so hard for social success."

19. *To aspire to professional success.*

[Very feelingly] "I see no future ahead for me in my chosen profession. Part-time work, which is all I could give as a homemaker, is not enough in my line of work . . . my major job now is to raise a family but there is not enough challenge in it or development for myself. I am not contented and I can see no future for myself. After the children are grown, I may go back to work; but the opportunities will be limited then."

20. *To acquire social skill, poise, and ease.*

"I always say such meaningless things in conversation."

21. *To contribute something worth while to society.*

"I think of myself as having a definite function as a wife and a mother but there are times when within myself I question whether I am doing anything really worth while for the world. I am belligerently feminist at times."

22. *To attract and make good friends.*

"I think S—— is right. I am an impossible person. Why should I expect to find a man who would be interested in me?"

23. *To question the status quo.*

"I rebel at my position in society. I feel the futility of this entire civilization."

*Areas of Experience*

Reading the histories for expressions of futility revealed not only common goals but the fact that many similar types of situations

existed for the women. Obviously, in these *areas of experience* thwarting had to occur repeatedly. The recurring life experiences fell into large general classifications which, though not discrete, could serve as a useful means of examining the available data. Life experiences served as the channels through which personal goals functioned.

Whenever an expression of futility occurred, it was classified into one or more areas of experience, depending upon the meaning and inclusiveness of the statement. The following illustrate the classifications of *futility expressed*:

### *Parents*

"Mother tries to run his life as well as mine. I can do nothing about it as long as she is with us."

### *Sex*

"I had thought we might work out a good sex adjustment, but, as the months have gone by, I have gradually lost hope."

### *Housekeeping*

"I find everything piles on top of me in housekeeping while my neighbor seems to manage very well."

Whenever possible an evidence of futility was classified in a given area of experience, even though the statement was a general one. For instance: "As far as I am concerned, I have too many problems and they are in too great a tangle for anyone to help me" indicated the presence of futility. The areas it involved had then to be determined. The woman's immediate discussion, the recurring pattern of difficulties which showed up in her conversation at that particular time, and the context of the statement all revealed the affected or closely related areas. In this particular instance, the woman was discussing her need of a job, her husband's failure in health, her own illness, and her community responsibilities which made an overwhelming demand on her time. All were recorded in the respective categories that had given rise to the above statement.

The life experiences about which the woman expressed futility yielded twenty-five large general categories. These vary in importance and complexity. Such a classification can only be sugges-

tive; it cannot be exhaustive. Since the scope of this study does not include an exact and quantitative analysis, the methods used are only for purposes of examining the presence of futility, and circumstances in which it exists, and not for measuring it.

Categories such as the following could never be entirely discrete, as real life experience is necessarily overlapping and interwoven. These particular categories were chosen because they represent the experiences observed most frequently in the cases studied, but undoubtedly others would have been added had additional cases been read. If life experiences were divided theoretically, the classifications could be narrowed, made more inclusive, or grouped altogether differently. However, the categories for this study are based on the areas of experience of this group of fifty women and are as follows:

1. *General attitudes toward self*

"I never have any spirit of play . . . I would give anything if I could loosen up . . . Try as hard as I can, it is impossible for me to overcome this."

"Everything about me is wrong."

"I'll never measure up to what I want myself to be."

2. *Aggressiveness*

"I know I try to manage too much. It is hard to overcome."

3. *Submissiveness*

"I am hopelessly teased at home. I never fight back but just take it."

4. *Attractiveness*

"I have never been pretty and never expect to be. There is nothing I can do about it."

5. *Health*

"My physical adjustment to enforced menopause is terrible. Sometimes I feel I cannot stand it."

*6. Sex*

"I feel now that nothing can be done for me in developing a satisfactory sex life, as I have no feeling whatever toward my husband."

*7. Interests*

"After coming here I felt at a loss as I had no interests outside the home."

*8. Social skills*

"I say to myself, 'You dumb thing, why do you do such things? You are so hopeless.'"

*9. Social prestige or status*

"I just wish mothers could get more credit for being mothers. Their job always seems such an unimportant one and that they are never doing anything worth while."

*10. Education*

"I knew I had to fail [graduate course] and there was nothing I could do about it."

*11. Religion*

"I would like to have a belief—a religion to wholeheartedly accept but I don't have any belief. I feel I can never have one."

*12. Parents*

"I have always resented these things in my parents but I know I can do nothing else about them."

"I don't think I will ever be able to talk with my father."

*13. Siblings*

"Try as hard as I can, I never feel that I will know my brother."

*14. Marriage (husband and wife relationship)*

"The irritations with my husband pile up until I feel I cannot stand them any more."

"I realize my marriage is hopelessly unsuccessful."

15. *Recognition by husband*

"I feel very despondent about our affairs. My husband has said frankly that he no longer has the interest in me that he did."

16. *Children*

"When things fail to work with D., I always feel at a loss to know what to do then."

17. *In-laws*

"I have failed hopelessly in living successfully with my mother-in-law."

18. *Friends*

"It is such an effort to have friends at home. I never think it is worth that much."

The next four areas are grouped together because they represent different aspects of the women's vocational experience. For those who did not carry remunerative jobs outside the home, house-keeping became the acknowledged vocation, or a combination of homemaking and community participation which provided the women with vocational channels. Finances, in every case, were related to the job of homemaking whether the woman was employed outside the home or not.

19. *Community participation*

"I feel I have so little to offer the community. I have no training."

20. *Vocation*

"I don't believe I will ever be successful in this kind of a job. I am not accurate or quick enough."

21. *Housekeeping*

"I feel very cramped in having nothing to do but household tasks. I am extremely dissatisfied with washing dishes and the general routine of housework for there is no chance to get out."

22. *Finances*

"Bills pile up higher and higher until we can't see the light of day."

"If I had financial security, it would be easier. Life holds nothing for me now and I feel in later years it will hold even less."

The final grouping of experience areas are ones that deal with crisis situations:

### 23. *Unwanted children*

"I can never get over that desperate situation—having a baby with my husband out of a job."

### 24. *Sterility*

"I cannot live a complete life without children."

"I could not see why others are able to have babies and I am not."

### 25. *Crises*

"My husband's illness has been diagnosed and I feel it is a hopeless thing."

"J—, my brother, was dying and I could do so little to help."

The twenty-five areas of life experience and the twenty-three life goals, although similar in many ways, differ basically. Experience makes up the life of an individual; goals form the direction and motivation for his life. Experience may be the goal itself or it may be the medium through which the goal is channeled. For example, social skills could serve primarily as a goal or simply be one of life's experiences. To strive to be socially skilled and adequate is to strive toward a goal. To use social skills in an effort to achieve other ends places this in the classification of life experience. Statements expressing futility could illustrate either a frustration of goals or a thwarting of life experience or both, depending upon the meaning given by the individual.

### *Life in General*

The final assessment of futility is made on the basis of statements about life in general. Such feelings usually arise from frustrated goals, thwartings within certain areas of experience, or a combination of these. The following is typical of these expressions of futility:

"My own life is such a tangle I feel little, if anything, can be done."



A young woman who considered herself physically unattractive, without social skills, a failure in her job, and in serious conflict with certain relatives, made the above assertion. She felt no family security, as all close family members had died during her early life. Formerly the center of all attention at home, she now received none. Marriage not only represented physical security to her, but it meant a place to be wanted. In her social group, marriage was the desired goal for women. She saw no opportunity for achieving this. Over and over, she referred to the frustrations of these goals and to a sense of futility over not achieving her desired ends.

"I really have nothing to live for."

In the next example we have a superior, attractive young married woman in her early thirties, whose marital adjustment had been muddled early in marriage. A serious conflict with her mother-in-law was never adjusted because the husband would take no stand. He belittled his wife's intelligence, did few things she enjoyed socially, and gave her no importance as a wife. Their sex adjustment was poor. Her parental home had given great importance to the function of a wife and mother. In her own home, this young woman felt she was a complete failure in her expected role.

"I am willing to try anything but I am sure nothing can be accomplished."

The third illustration is taken from the history of a woman in her late thirties. Holding a high standard of marital happiness based on her parental home life and having a great urge to give service to humanity, she found herself failing in both. The income was dwindling; her husband's health had failed; she herself was too ill to carry on the many community services she considered vitally important; sex relations were abhorrent to her; she felt herself aging; and she considered her chances for happiness slight.

"I begin to think life is so futile for me."

Statements of futility made about *life in general* were brought into one large classification. This step followed selection of cases on the basis of futility expressed and the analysis and classification of life goals and areas of experience about which frustration was

shown. The next procedure in the analysis was to determine the degree to which a sense of futility existed.

#### DEGREE OF FUTILITY

Goals differed in importance and experience areas represented a wide range of values for the women; hence frustration in these produced varying degrees of intensity in the feelings of futility which resulted. Clearly the statement "I have thought many times that I should commit suicide" expresses a far greater degree of futility than the statement "Training the baby irks me. I have a feeding problem with her and I feel hopeless about it."

In order to determine degree of futility, the following factors were taken into account: (1) *intensity of statement made*; (2) *apparent importance to the woman of the goal or area of experience in which frustration occurred*; (3) *repetition of expression of futility*; (4) *recurrence of situation about which futility is or had been expressed*; (5) *amount of success the woman had had in dispelling futility in the area or goal referred to*; (6) *interviewer's description of woman's behavior which indicated futility*; and (7) *interviewer's recognition of existing futility*.

The cases were read for the fourth time in order to determine the degree of futility expressed in them. An approximate scale was devised which rated marked futility (+++); moderate futility (++) ; mild futility (+); and absence of futility (-). This scale was applied to the seven indications of futility given in the above paragraph. An evaluation of these was recorded for each woman. Then statements of futility which previously had been marked were again examined in the light of (1) the frustration of major goals which brought the reaction of futility; (2) areas of experience in which futility was expressed; and (3) frequency with which futility about life in general was stated. Whether or not the woman made repeated use of the futility reaction as a technique of adapting to frustrating situations rather than a more aggressive technique was noted.

By assembling all evidence of futility gained in reading a complete case four times, by evaluating it on the basis of thorough knowledge of the history, and by examining it in the light of the

woman's total personality pattern, the investigator was then able to make an approximate estimate of the degree of futility indicated in the case.

In the evaluation of histories for degree of futility present, certain cases fell into two extreme groups (—) and (+++). Those cases which expressed moderate futility, while often bordering on either extreme, were more difficult to place. The rating (—) was used to indicate that in certain areas of experience no futility was apparent. The following excerpts from three histories briefly illustrate variations in the degree to which futility seemed to be present.

The first history, a case of extreme (+++) futility, was rated according to the seven qualifications proposed:<sup>2</sup>

1. *Intensity of statement* for this woman was revealed in such illustrations as "I reach the place so many times where it does not seem life is worth living" and "My own life is in such a tangle, no one can help me out."

2. *Apparent importance* of her frustrated goals and thwarting experiences was shown by the futility expressed in her marriage, her vocation, her health, and life in general.

3. *Repetition of similar expressions* of futility occurred many times during a single interview, and also from one interview to another.

4. *Recurrence of situations* which relate to expressions of futility came in her continued poor health, difficult marital problems, vocational disappointments, and repeated failures to direct her life as desired.

5. *Amount of success in dispelling* her sense of futility seemed negligible in spite of her intense efforts.

6. *Description of the woman's behavior* was recorded in these words: "She cried hopelessly," "Appeared dejected," and "Spoke in a weary, depressed manner."

7. *Interviewer's recognition* of futility was interpreted thus: "She showed throughout that the situation was too much for her."

A second history is used here because it appeared to indicate moderate (++) futility:<sup>3</sup> (1) *Intensity of statement* was illus-

<sup>2</sup>For this case history see Chapter IX. The case analysis is found in the Appendix.

<sup>3</sup>See life history 6 in Chapter IX.

trated by "I always resented these things in my parents but I knew I could do nothing else but accept them." (2) *Apparent importance* of frustration was shown in her failure to become independent, even after marriage, although she had expected marriage to be her way to freedom from her parents. (3) *Repetition of expressions* of futility was made in nearly every interview. (4) *Recurrence of situations* was illustrated by the father's repeated efforts to dominate her with money and gifts. (5) *Success in overcoming* futility was evident in certain instances although these feelings continued to persist. (6) *Descriptions* from time to time presented her as dejected. (7) *No recognition* of existing futility was made by the interviewer.

A third history revealed futility to an apparently slight (+) degree.<sup>4</sup> It was examined in the seven ways used with the first two cases. In this particular life history the woman gave expression to feelings of futility only three times. (1) *Intensity of statement* was expressed once in "I could not possibly make them all," which referred to a combination of circumstances that needed many adjustments. (2) *Apparent importance* of frustration showed in her mild statement about feeling sexually inferior "which I will have to accept." She also expressed rather mildly a hopelessness about her old age and possible financial insecurity. No statements of futility were (3) *repeated*. Indication of (4) *recurrence of situations* came only in sexual inferiority. She seemed to have a fair (5) *amount of success* in her technique of acceptance. The interviewer (6) *recorded no description* of an apparent attitude of dejection. The only (7) *recognition* of futility on the part of the interviewer dealt with the woman's attitude toward aging.

There seemed to be no way of checking the degree of futility for a case except subjectively. The investigator took into account the evidence of futility in *each area of experience* while using all seven specifications; she accumulated every trace of futility which was apparent in the *woman's life goals or motivations* by these same specifications; and she identified the woman's generalized as well as *specific attitudes toward life in general*. All of this was done segmentally before making an approximation of the degree of futility for each life history as a whole.

<sup>4</sup> This history is not reproduced in full but is one of the fifty histories.

By using the seven specifications for determining degree of futility, it was found that the women differed from each other in individual goals, specific experiences, and attitudes toward life, yet from one history to another these goals, experiences, and attitudes were seen repeated and in different combinations. With this method individual configurations became apparent but at the same time the goals most frequently frustrated among this group of college educated women could be determined. The areas of experience in which most of their thwartings seemed to occur were identified as well.

By applying the seven specifications for detecting the presence of futility, a case could be examined minutely, both for segmental evidence of such feelings and for the total picture of futility, as shown in the history. The investigator, in the fourth complete reading of the cases, assembled all evidence and judged the degree of futility in each history as a whole and in each of its parts.

Every history was analyzed in detail. Two cases which illustrate this method are presented in the Appendix. The outline given here indicates each step taken:

#### Outline for Analysis of Life History

1. *Verbatim expressions* of futility listed.
2. Woman's *major life goals* traced.
3. *Frustrated goals* determined.
4. *Areas of experience* discovered in which *frustrations* occur.
5. *Degree of futility* shown in the case as a whole and in each area of experience.
6. *Techniques* used by woman for adjustment to frustration traced.
7. *Factors related to a sense of futility* and the woman's *success or failure* in overcoming futility brought to light.
8. The woman's *unique life pattern* comprehended.

The limitations and dangers of a one-man rating in a study such as this are clear. Undeniably, a competent jury would have given far more reliability to the analysis, but this was too impractical a plan to be used in view of the unusual length of each history (average: 66,500 words per case). The reading alone would have in-

volved a tremendous amount of time scarcely possible to impose upon busy professional people.

Perhaps the reader can best judge the reliability of the investigator's method. The illustrative cases presented in Chapter IX (although in condensed versions) should demonstrate whether or not they have been reasonably interpreted. The reader can trace for himself the life goals of each woman, what her experiences are, and the kinds of frustrations which result in futility for her.

It is important to keep in mind that the investigator's analysis was made on a complete case study while only the condensation of each can be presented for illustration. Every effort has been made to retain as much detail as possible of the original history.

The investigator believes that the ways of determining futility as described above and used to obtain the findings of this study will present a sufficiently reliable method to serve as a starting point for others interested in extending the investigation of futility.

The findings which resulted from the analyses of all fifty cases are presented in the following chapters.

#### SUMMARY

The cases used for this study were selected because futility was expressed in them. Phrases which in and of themselves indicated feelings of futility even when taken out of their contextual meaning served as determinants in choosing the cases to be studied. Without such expressions a case was rejected.

Having chosen fifty life histories to study, the next step in procedure was to find the factors associated with a sense of futility. Although each life history was unique, there were elements common to many of the cases which, if recognized and understood, it was believed would shed light on the problem as a whole. The expressions of futility were then examined for contextual meaning and for all associated factors.

Each woman appeared to have certain goals toward which she was striving—certain aspirations which gave direction to her behavior. Her feelings of futility often indicated frustration of these goals. After reading the histories and identifying the aspirations, a classification of twenty-three goals was made. Not all of the

women had the same goals but a number of these goals were repeated from one history to another, although expressed in terms characteristic of the individual.

The woman's goals found channels through the experiences of daily living. By no means could all of life experiences be satisfying; hence from time to time frustration was inevitable. The thwartings occurred in areas of experience through which the individual's goals were channeled as well as throughout all areas of life experience. To identify thwarting in life experience and frustration of life goals helped to establish the degree of futility in each history.

After four readings of each case the degree of feeling futile was determined by the investigator's interpretation and recognition of the following in every history:

1. *Intensity* of statement of futility.
2. *Importance* to woman of occurrence of frustration whether in life goals or daily experience only.
3. *Repetition* of statements expressing futility.
4. *Recurrence* of situations related to futility.
5. *Success or failure* in reducing futility.
6. *Description* of woman's behavior indicating frustration.
7. *Recognition* by interviewer of the woman's sense of futility.

In order to arrive at the degree of futility for each case, the woman's unique and characteristic life pattern had to be identified and examined.

The reading of the fifty cases was carried out in the following steps:

*First reading:* To locate and mark verbalized expressions of futility found in a case.

Actual statements by the woman that she felt futile or hopeless formed the primary basis for choosing or eliminating a case. The cases were marked for this verbatim evidence.

*Second reading:* To determine all evidence of futility and to classify statements.

All *situations or experiences* to which statements of futility related were checked in the cases. Statements were examined carefully for contextual meanings.

The interviewer's *description* of the woman's attitude and behavior were marked as evidence of her hopelessness.

The interviewer's recognition in the history of the woman's apparent feelings of futility was taken into account.

*Third reading:* To explore the woman's major life goals, the areas of experience which constitute her life, the techniques for achieving her goals, and the frustrations of meaningful experience.

Apparent in every case were definite drives or *life goals*. The classification of goals into twenty-three different categories evolved from the histories.

Statements of futility which were found in the cases were then matched with the *life goals* of each woman for evidence of relationships. Situational responses, descriptions and interpretations were also examined in connection with the life goals.

Each woman had a variety of life experiences in which frustration inevitably resulted. These were classified in twenty-five areas of *experience*.

Statements of futility were checked with areas of *experience* for evidence of relationships.

Statements of futility about *life in general* were checked with both *life goals* and *areas of experience* for any relationships.

*Fourth reading:* To assemble all evidence in order to determine the degree of futility experienced; and to see as a whole the woman's unique life pattern.

By examining the woman's life as a whole, together with all evidence associated with feeling futile, the degree of futility was judged for each history.

The above method was followed in the examination of each life history. The findings of all fifty cases are presented in Chapter V.



## CHAPTER V

### *Findings: Analyses of Fifty Cases*

These fifty life histories of college women were analyzed, and the findings from the analyses are herewith presented. The results bring into focus many factors associated with futility, and make possible certain inferences and conclusions.

In the analyses of the histories common areas of daily living in which futility is encountered were brought to light. They also revealed how frequently futility was expressed and the variety of ways in which the women experienced a sense of futility.

As was described in the preceding chapter, areas of experience where futility was indicated were arranged in twenty-five different classifications for purposes of analysis. By this means it was possible to *approximate the degree of futility for each case as a whole*, and, by putting together all fifty histories, to discover the *experience areas most frequently indicating futility for the entire group*.

#### FINDINGS ON AREAS OF EXPERIENCE

All experience areas which revealed evidence of futility in the fifty histories are presented in Table I. This analysis throws into relief a number of problems which will be discussed in the following pages.

To begin with, when *forty women out of a group of fifty who are college graduates express futility over relationships with their parents in their adult lives* the fact is exceedingly significant, if not startling. These results seem worthy of a separate chapter, hence they will be discussed in detail in Chapter VI.

*Sex adjustments also drew expressions of futility from forty of the women.* Since many recent studies have dealt exclusively with the difficulties of sex adjustment, and it seems such a paramount

TABLE I  
DEGREE OF FUTILITY SHOWN IN TWENTY-FIVE AREAS  
OF EXPERIENCE FOR A GROUP OF FIFTY WOMEN

Area of Experience	Degree of Futility Expressed				Total No. of Women
	None	Slight	Moderate	Marked	
Parent relationship .....	10	8	7	25	40
Sex adjustment .....	10	8	15	17	40
Finances .....	12	13	13	12	38
Attitudes toward self .....	13	11	18	8	37
Attractiveness .....	13	15	11	11	37
Health .....	14	21	3	12	36
Husband-wife relationships .....	16	12	8	14	34*
Social skills .....	17	9	10	14	33
Friends .....	18	18	8	6	32
Aggressiveness .....	20	11	12	7	30
Recognition by husband ..	20	10	6	14	30*
Housekeeping .....	20	20	10	10	30
Crises .....	21	13	6	11	29
Social prestige .....	22	10	8	10	28
Vocation .....	22	14	9	5	28**
Religion .....	23	24	2	1	27
Community participation ..	24	14	7	11	26
Children .....	26	6	7	13	24
In-law relationships .....	27	10	6	7	23
Sibling relationships .....	30	13	3	4	20***
Interests .....	31	14	3	2	19
Submissiveness .....	32	8	7	3	18
Education .....	33	10	4	3	17
Sterility .....	34	7	3	6	16*
Unwanted child .....	34	3	2	11	16*

\* Total number of women (40) married.

\*\* Total number of women (40) with vocational experience.

\*\*\* Total number of women (39) who had siblings.

problem in society, a discussion of this study's results will be presented in Chapter VII.

*Experience with money and financial matters was one of the areas most frequently mentioned, and in this thirty-eight of the women expressed futility.* It should be mentioned here that much of the original history material was collected during the depression years 1932 to 1935. As financial conditions for many of the women were critical during these times and as most of the women were from homes formerly having high incomes, a temporary sense of

futility is understandable. With the median yearly income of the husbands at \$2,880, it might seem rather unusual for so high a percentage of the women to express futility. Young college people from good socio-economic backgrounds usually set for themselves high standards. Those women not only desired to parallel the parental home in its standards of living and to keep pace with their own social group but held the apparent wish to exceed their former level of living. Hence, in their early years of struggle, a number of these women indicated futility over what might otherwise be considered an adequate income. The income itself bore little actual relation to the feelings of futility which were expressed, except as the lack of income meant frustration of certain goals to the individual. One felt futile with twelve hundred per year, while another expressed futility over a five thousand dollar yearly income.

In a number of ways, the women revealed futility over themselves and their own personal reactions. For purposes of analysis, these reactions were divided into several different areas, as discussed in Chapter IV.

*Thirty-seven of the women showed feelings of futility in their attitudes toward themselves.* "I wonder if I'll ever change," "I will never succeed in anything," and "I am accomplishing nothing" are indicative of the statements which pointed to feelings of futility about themselves. Only 16 percent of the group indicated this feeling to a marked degree.

Many of the women frequently referred to themselves as "too aggressive" or "too bossy," hence this attitude was analyzed apart from the more general feelings toward self. Submissiveness was also considered as a specific area. *Thirty of the group revealed a sense of futility about their aggressiveness while eighteen indicated that submissive behavior produced feelings of futility.*

*A lack of personal attractiveness caused thirty-seven of the women to express a sense of futility.* This, when coupled with other attitudes the women showed toward themselves, makes personal adjustment loom high as an area where futility is expressed and shown.

In an earlier study<sup>(18)</sup> made on women's problems, their feelings of dissatisfaction about themselves in their social relationships headed the list of problems. *To feel hopeless about one's self, as*

some did, was a less usual type of problem than those found in the original study but an intensely discouraging one. Ultimately, security is dependent upon the individual's belief in himself. To feel futile about one's self, behavior, appearance, or expected role may well have a deterrent effect on the maturing of personality.

Few if any of the futile feelings the women held about themselves seemed justified when considered from an objective point of view. The telling factor, however, is that scarcely any of them had received help in self-understanding and in finding possible ways of overcoming their feelings of inadequacy. To have help in understanding themselves, to gain devices for adjusting to situations, or to realize their greatest potentialities seemed to be more or less lacking from their background.

Health is also a matter of each woman's personal adjustment. It varies from attitudes to the more tangible experiences which can be faced and dealt with concretely. However, *thirty-six of the women indicated futility about their own physical health* and twelve of them expressed this to a marked degree. Physical examinations revealed that few of the women had really serious physical handicaps, yet many of them had health problems which reduced their efficiency and colored their outlook on life. In nearly every instance, these difficulties might have been corrected with ease. Sometimes advice as to posture correction, better fitting girdles, orthopedic shoes, skin treatment, and other equally simple remedies brought relief from a seemingly hopeless problem. For example, several of the women followed the nutritional advice given them at the Center and, as a result, fatigue was reduced almost at once. One might expect college graduates to realize the close correlation between good health and mental attitude, but that was not always evident. Many had not consulted a physician for years, except when giving birth to their babies. Some few of the women suffered serious physical maladies. Others felt futile about their health problems.

These women also expressed futility about their social selves. *In the area of social skills, thirty-three of the entire group expressed a sense of futility.* Because of their background of social privilege and education, the women, when judged objectively, would be considered well skilled socially. At the same time, the standards of their social group were proportionately high. It was surprising how

often they referred to inability to meet social situations, when in recounting incidents for their histories they indicated social participation of many varieties. If acquisition of social skill tends to reduce anxiety and helplessness over situations, then one can wonder why "educated" women did not acquire those skills which would prevent them from feeling futile.

A person determines in his thinking his own social status, whatever it is. When he is unable to achieve this, the reaction may be a sense of futility. *Of these college women, twenty-eight felt futile in achieving or maintaining their expected prestige or social status.* Some of the women considered social prestige an individual matter; others conceived it as a family affair; and still others saw it as a problem of group standing. The statements "I will never be accepted by them," "Our family did not have much chance in the community where our rich relatives lived," and "I feel that the class of women I belong to is so futile" are representative statements of futility concerning status.

It might be expected that college women would have many interests to pursue. Satisfying those interests depends upon a number of things: money, locality, health, sympathy of family members, aptitudes, and the number of fixed responsibilities and activities the individual has. Of this group, *nineteen revealed a sense of futility about their interests.* There was inflexibility about the interests the women followed, and a definite tendency to orthodoxy in most of their activities. Some few were imaginative and creative in outlets for themselves, but many were not. To dance if her social group danced, to play bridge or sail or attend lectures if others did, became the determining factor in interests for many. Statements like these were frequent: "It is hopeless for me to start a hobby when we have no money" and "I can have no outside interests until my children are older." Ingenuity among the women in expanding their interests through and around home activities was rarely found. Monotony was a complaint they made, with little offered to counteract it. Some few women, however, were scornful of the usual interests and activities, and expressed futility when forced to participate in traditional outlets.

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seven of the women indicated some feeling of futility about their religion, only one showed this to a marked degree. Among these women, religion did not seem to produce a sense of hopelessness to as great an extent as did the more pressing and immediate problems of daily living and personal adjustment. Although their expressions of futility about life in general could be interpreted as indicative of religious attitudes, this investigation has used these statements literally and in their contextual meaning. Apparently most of the women were not deeply affected or disturbed by religion as a vital force in their lives. If they had used religion successfully, the superficial evidence was not apparent in this study. If religion had failed them, they transferred the blame to some other area of experience. Because of its very nature, religion did not make the immediate claims on the women that more urgent concerns did; hence, a lesser degree of futility was expressed regarding it.

The majority of the women did not continue formal education after graduation from college. They had much to say about their college lives, and some of them showed feelings of futility; but since this is an investigation during the period of adult life of women college graduates, reference to early experience (except for background and in tracing goals) is omitted. *Seventeen of the women showed futility in their educational experience.* They took graduate courses for various reasons: to improve themselves professionally; to prepare for a new kind of work; to be ready to return to work; to gain understanding of family relationships; and to acquire further knowledge. Oftentimes when entering courses after years of no study, a great feeling of inadequacy descended upon the woman for fear she could not keep up her earlier standards of study and performance.

The women experienced many types of relationships and showed futility in these to varying degrees. Husband-wife relationships were the ones most frequently mentioned next to relationships with parents. Thirty-four of the married women revealed futility in their husband-wife relationships, which means that *80 percent of the married women expressed futility in making adjustments with their husbands.* Approximately 30 percent of the forty married women showed marked futility. These relationships involve all conflict or disturbing situations that occur between husband and



wife in which the wife shows futility. The following statements indicate this: "Nothing can be done to help our marriage unless we get a better understanding. I don't believe that can be done." "My marriage may improve, but I am sure neither of us will ever get out of it what we want." "I now realize that there can never be complete and total understanding between people, even in marriage." "I don't think there is any use for A. and me to try to work out our marriage."

Whether or not the women were made to feel important by their husbands was analyzed separately from the areas of husband-wife relations and from social prestige. This in itself seemed to be a unique evaluation of prestige within the marital relationship, which laid the ground for considerable feeling of futility. *Thirty of the married women revealed a sense of futility about the type of recognition the husband gave them and fourteen showed this to a marked degree.* Most of them showed futility when they were not recognized, or when they were belittled by their husbands. In a few cases this was reversed. The wife felt futile because her husband approved too completely of her. Such was the case when the woman no longer loved her husband, or when she felt he would never apply any discriminating standards in his judgment of her.

*Among the married women, twenty-four gave evidence of futility in the care and training of their children, while eleven showed it markedly.* One of the areas in which the women sought most help at the Center was relationship to their children. Problems of child training today loom high. Parents seem uncertain as to their own methods, and at the same time they have many opportunities for gleaning conflicting advice about the management of children. Mothers often have one idea of dealing with their children, while fathers have another entirely different one. The same problems of conflict that have always arisen between parents and children existed with these women. In addition, there is another type of problem, which comes as an outgrowth of more adequate knowledge of personality development. The parent is more acutely concerned with symptomatic behavior than ever before.

Perhaps less futility was shown by these women with their child problems than might be expected, for several reasons: First,

children in their normal development often outgrow difficulties which otherwise could not be overcome by parents. Second, women can make adjustments with their children because such relationships are less firmly set than the other habit patterns of a lifetime and because, also, women are many times consciously willing to do what is necessary for change in this area. Third, there has developed for parents a workable and practical type of child study which is available and many mothers have already made good use of this; hence something can be done to help.

In-law relationships included both the single and the married women, for a sister-in-law could be just as difficult as a mother-in-law. *Twenty-three of the group gave evidence of futility with regard to their in-laws.* Oftentimes this problem was in reality a parent-child or relative-child problem which the husband was unable to resolve. Realizing this, the wife saw no hope of solution. For example: "Mother S. will always baby my husband whenever we are together, which makes the situation impossible for us." In many instances the problem was one of competition. If the woman did not recognize this, she was unable to relieve the difficulty.

Eleven of the group were only children. *Of the thirty-nine women who had siblings, twenty showed futility in their relationships with them.* Four expressed marked futility while 13 indicated it to a mild degree. Had this study been made earlier in the lives of these women, their sibling relationships no doubt would have revealed more futility. Most of the women had lived away from home so long that their sibling relationships were not the disturbing factors that they might have been earlier.

*Relationships with their friends resulted in feelings of futility for thirty-two of the women.* Only six women showed marked futility in this regard. The women as a whole were social, outgoing individuals who were making, for the most part, good adjustments with the friends they had. Relationships with friends were important, but not to the intense degree of many other relationships. Some of the single women and fewer of the married ones were unable to satisfy their need for friendships. Opportunities for making friends in a large city were not too readily available when the woman was a newcomer, young, and limited in money for clubs and other contacts. She sometimes felt helpless because her

difficulties in finding friends contrasted sharply with their accessibility in her home town or during college life.

Since only forty of the women had continued in gainful employment after marriage, these alone were considered in estimating futility with regard to vocations. *Of these, twenty-eight women gave evidence of feeling futile in the vocational area.* If she had held a full-time job during her adult life, the woman was included in the vocational group. Four of them at some time "assisted in a gift shop"; "helped in father's store"; "were on the substitute teaching list"; and "helped in the bank." This experience was limited only to a few weeks in each case. Six of the women had never worked. At the time the histories were collected, the nine single women, the one divorcée, and six of the married women were working. All of these held regular positions. Several others in the group obtained occasional work. They taught, sold, tutored, and demonstrated, as well as served in social work, publicity, and secretarial jobs. Their incomes ranged from \$840 to \$2,600 per year for full-time work. Statements of futility like the following were made: "So much of my job is just a waste of time." "I sometimes feel my work is a complete failure. I feel that all my efforts have gone for nothing." "I am afraid I won't make good on this new job."

A few of the women who no longer actually worked in their chosen vocations or professions revealed a sense of futility. Indicative of this is the following statement: "I see no future ahead for me in my chosen profession. Part-time work, which is all I could give as a homemaker, is not enough in my line of work." Often the husband's attitude about the wife's working related to her sense of futility as shown by: "But I don't like housework, and it is hard to manage a home. I know I could have a definite contribution to make in my profession. I am sure my husband wanted our second baby to prevent any chance of my returning to work." With the six married women who worked, there was a definite economic need. The few who did part-time work had been successful professionally and were often called upon to do particular jobs for which they were especially qualified. Some of them wanted no more work than the occasional call, while others missed keenly their former positions.

study, although representing two extremes of the same problem. Of the forty married women, *sixteen revealed futility over not having children. Sixteen also indicated futility over pregnancies that they did not want.* It is interesting to note that the same number of women felt futile in one extreme as in the other. However, eleven of the women expressed marked futility over unwanted children as contrasted with six over the problem of sterility. The woman who did not want children was faced with an immediate crisis when an unexpected pregnancy occurred. She had no socially accepted means of resolving this problem except to have the baby, regardless of hardships. The situation for her was impossible. A sense of extreme futility was more often felt here than in the problem of sterility, which was a long-time accumulative problem for which compensations might be developed.

#### EXPERIENCE AREAS IN RELATION TO LIFE GOALS

Every woman in the study appeared to have definite goals toward which she was striving. Through actual life experience she attempted to arrive at her individual goals. Such varied experience gave many ways of achieving what she desired in life. For instance, the woman with a goal to dominate and control people seemed to seek this within marriage if she married, in her children if she had children, in her job if she followed a vocation, in her social group according to her circumstances, and also in her own ability to draw people to her. At an early age, one woman in the study indicated her goal of dominating and controlling others, and this appeared to be of paramount importance to her in childhood as well as being successful. In college her established technique of domination did not succeed, but when helped there to gain insight she eventually developed new methods which were socially acceptable and yet made it possible to obtain what she wanted. She has presented a picture of a person who throughout life must dominate but has learned to do this in ways socially constructive and acceptable to her husband, her children, and others outside the family. Another woman, whose major goal also was to dominate, practically cut herself off from her family, her friends, and her business contacts. She realized this but continued with her same old techniques, in

spite of the failures that followed. The first woman now possesses remarkable insight into her goals, and ways of reaching these. The other has none. She is baffled by her failures, but goes on doggedly and determinedly, inevitably thwarted. The former woman expresses less and less futility.

*By indicating a sense of futility, a woman demonstrates one way of reacting to frustration of her goals.* She gives expression to such feelings whenever her goals are frustrated and in whatever areas of experience the thwartings occur. As the preceding paragraph shows, one woman expressed a marked sense of futility. On the other hand, the other expressed futility only temporarily. Whenever her goal was frustrated, she tried out new techniques which eventually brought success. When her old temper tantrums (so satisfactory with her father) failed to work on her husband, she learned that cooperation on a more mature level made possible certain controls she would otherwise not have had. Control of herself seemed to be the real development. This allowed achievement of her primary goal, but in a constructive, positive way. The other woman's methods destroyed the possibility of achieving her goals and produced a sense of futility.

To modify the goals of either of these women would have been impossible unless they themselves had so desired and had been willing and able to make the tremendous effort that such change would necessitate. However, with help, the one woman was able to find socially acceptable, personally satisfying techniques of adjustment which, when intelligently applied in specific areas of experience, ultimately led toward the satisfaction of her basic life goals. The other woman could modify neither goal nor technique.

Most futility shown in these histories was revealed through various experience areas, although some expressions of futility applied directly to the woman's life goals. Each experience in its own characteristic way interpreted the life goal. Such a statement as "I am doing nothing worth while" might be a direct expression of futility about the frustrated goal of making a worth-while contribution to life. When taken in context, however, a very different meaning could be given to the expression. The woman who was given no recognition by her husband and was even belittled by him might in this way be expressing frustration of an important goal.

Again, such a statement could come from a woman who had given up a successful professional life and for whom the routine of house-keeping was drudgery. In this way she expressed frustration in her professional drive. Still another interpretation of this same expression could be for the woman whose health is such that she sees little future in the realization of an active, busy life. Hence, by means of the area of health or poor health, she has expressed frustration in one or all of her basic goals, whatever they may be.

#### FINDINGS ON LIFE GOALS

The existence of certain definite goals, or syndromes of goals, toward which each woman was striving became evident in reading the histories. As outlined in Chapter II, these particular goals seemed to represent to the women their individual ways of interpreting and achieving basic needs and of establishing their own pattern of motivation. In this study, twenty-three specific goals appeared evident. Such goals, although in no sense complete or exhaustive, seemed to represent the primary and most meaningful ends toward which these women were striving.

Goals which were characteristic of an individual woman might be observed also in others of the group. The analysis presented in Table II reveals the number of times the major goals were found among these histories.

It must be kept in mind that goals may or may not be conscious. Some of the women appeared to have no awareness of their real goals. Others seemed to recognize with amazing clarity the ends toward which their lives were directed. Still others had a partial understanding or an occasional glimmer of the major aspirations of their lives. For example, one woman in the study apparently had not the faintest idea of her tremendous struggle to remain a submissive, irresponsible child. Another recognized clearly her need to manage, manipulate, and control all those about her, while still another acknowledged in part that she struggled continuously toward social prestige, but she was oblivious of the extent to which this driving force existed in her life.

In every case, evidence of both conscious and unconscious strivings was used to determine the major life goals of the women. By

TABLE II  
NUMBER OF TIMES MAJOR LIFE GOALS APPEARED  
IN CASES OF FIFTY COLLEGE WOMEN

Goal	Number of Women
To achieve success as a wife	27
To dominate, control, manage or manipulate people in the environment	24
To be a good and successful mother	23
To cling to security (love, money, place, etc.)	19
To live primarily for self—gratifying own desires	17
To conform to social opinion and expectation	17
To aspire to professional success	15
To acquire social skill, poise, and ease	15
To submit to or follow authority of parents or parent-substitutes	14
To resist or break from control of others	13
To remain herself—an individual inviolate	13
To contribute something worth while to society	12
To maintain peace and avoid friction by every possible means	11
To experience parenthood	11
To be socially prominent or important	11
To seek admiration and adulation	10
To attain marital status	9
To plan a constructive way of life—to have a conscious philosophy and try to follow this	8
To succeed, excel, or get ahead in competition	7
To attract and make good friends	7
To question the <i>status quo</i>	5
To be dominated or controlled by others	4
To live life excitedly	4

their repeated, continual, and consistent behavior throughout life, and their reference to these strivings, the women made recognizable their basic goals. When the histories were examined carefully, the goals usually could be ascertained. Although the analysis of goals for each woman had to be based on observable data, the frequent contacts and long hours of interviewing provided a fairly satisfactory basis for identifying their goals.

Since forty of the women were married, it is reasonable to find that *twenty-seven of the entire group indicated a goal of successful marriage*. This goal is basic to our social pattern and one toward which most women throughout their entire lives have striven. To make good in so important a personal and social goal is a strong

motivation. Such ends might be comparable to the man's success in his vocation. Then too, it seems as difficult for people to achieve the complete satisfaction they desire in their marital relationships as in their vocations; therefore, it is understandable that this would be one of the major strivings in this group. *To be a good and successful mother as indicated by twenty-three of the women* is also in line with the goal to achieve success in marriage as a wife.

Of the more personal goals, the one to dominate, control, and manage people in the environment heads the list for the group. An entire study might be done on this one point, and, as far as its contribution to an understanding of futility is concerned, the significance is great. The child who in his early years has learned by means of direct or indirect methods to find satisfaction in dominating and controlling people around him will probably make every effort to continue this in all his relationships. It becomes his fixed pattern. The fact that we live in a competitive society emphasizes the need to strive for such goals and to enhance their values. That this goal may be extremely detrimental to personal relationships will be discussed later. *Twenty-four of the group indicated a goal to control and dominate others.*

The next goal in order of importance is that of *security, which was sought by nineteen of the women.* The security indicated here might be representative of a lack of desire to change, a need to cling to certain strong individuals, the need to find response, or the struggle to achieve economic security.

In contrast to this, *only a small number, four, wished to live excitedly and strove in that direction.* One must recognize that security has become an important symbol in contemporary life. The lack of stable values seems also to be a contributing factor. Some of the women have found compensatory outlets; hence there is no reason to strive for excitement in life.

Three of the goals might be said to express variations of one theme. To live primarily for self seemed to be the goal of an individual whose self-centeredness precluded or was in conflict with striving toward more social goals. *Seventeen of the women in their histories appeared to live primarily for self.* A somewhat different turn to this goal is apparent in *the desire to remain herself, an individual inviolate, as indicated by thirteen of the women.* Several



of the group appeared to have made both of these goals theirs. However, seven expressed the first only, while three revealed the latter. A woman who keeps her importance by not being encroached upon, or can retain her own inviolability, may at the same time be able to cooperate in social relationships to a thoroughly satisfactory degree. Circumstances would determine this largely. *To seek admiration and adulation is revealed as the goal of ten of the group.* This may be a part of the drive to gratify one's own desires, or it may easily be the carry-over from a childhood pattern of extreme admiration. It can be said that there are few individuals who do not wish for admiration. Either the social consciousness in this group, however, is so well developed that only ten of these women overtly express this desire or they have been redirected along more mature lines to such an extent that the seeking of admiration is not of major importance.

To conform to social opinion and expectation is a strong force in our society. People are liked who on the whole gain group approval. Most of these women from childhood on were trained to conform to social expectation. It is interesting and significant that only *seventeen of the women seemed to have retained conformity as one of their major goals.* Education may have been largely responsible in freeing the others from this need to conform.

*To submit to or to follow the approval of their parents was the major drive of fourteen.* The four whose goal seems to be to submit to others may simply have made a transfer from submitting to parents to those other than parents, or may be submissive in all relationships, as can be seen in the case of Frances L.<sup>1</sup> Since the early years of every child's life are spent in conforming to the wishes of his parents, it seems interesting that only this number has remained really submissive to parental authority. It may be indicative not only of intellectual maturing but of emotional growth which may or may not have been consciously furthered by the parents. This drive may also be one main reason for such marked feelings of futility with regard to parent relationships. The woman's goal has changed but her parents' pattern has not.

*To acquire social skill, poise, and ease was a major goal of fifteen.* This is interesting in the light of the study of problems made of

<sup>1</sup> Case history 5 in Chapter IX.

conscious plan of life. Although from their behavior it could be seen that they actually had very definite goals toward which they were striving, they appeared unaware of most of them. When asked, they usually expressed a wish for a philosophy of life, never being aware that they already had one. Some others in the group had more realization of their own unique patterns of striving but took a fatalistic attitude toward themselves. Because they had functioned this way always, they believed they would remain what they were. The women who saw their lives with some objectivity, with a definite and conscious pattern to follow, often found it exceedingly difficult to bring their experiences and themselves in line with a planned way of life. At times other drives set up ambivalence within them. Nevertheless, some sustained a conscious and planned way of life consistent with the structure evolved early in childhood.

*Twelve of the women indicated a goal of making worth-while contributions to life, but few followed up this goal with action in any way they considered important.* Whether such a goal had actually evolved from childhood experiences, family pattern, or the awareness of social responsibility which comes with education, could scarcely be determined.

At times it was difficult to determine whether futility which was experienced resulted directly from a thwarted goal or simply from some frustrated life experience which eventually would interpret another goal for the woman. For instance, the goal of being a good mother, when frustrated, might result in futility. At the same time, training of children, as one area of experience, when thwarted again and again, could produce frustration of other basic goals. In order to determine whether feelings of futility were shown directly for a frustrated goal or indirectly through certain experience required careful scrutiny of the material and use of all related factors.

Besides having her own particular goals and aspirations, and living through her own unique experiences, each woman had characteristic ways of achieving her ends and of adapting to frustration of these. As seen in earlier discussion, the techniques of adjustment to frustration may be aggressive or submissive, positive or negative, belligerent or pacific, outgoing or withdrawing, social or anti-social. They may be satisfying or unsatisfying, but these techniques of adjustment are the ones that serve for the person who uses them again and

## CHAPTER VI

### *Findings: On Parent Relationships*

When forty out of a group of fifty women college graduates express futility in adult life over relationships with their parents, as is true in this study, the knowledge is arresting. Even more startling is the evidence that twenty-five of them revealed *marked futility* in these relationships. For women in adult life to feel hopeless and futile in relation to their parents shows the persistent importance of such relationships. The long-established effect of parent dominance, even in adult years, must be taken into account.

As has been noted, a variety of thwarting experiences occurred in the lives of these women; many major goals were ultimately not achieved. From some of these frustrations a sense of futility or a feeling of hopelessness developed. The present findings are significant in that the parent relationship produced a sense of futility among such a large proportion of this group of women. Even after problems of maturity, such as marital adjustment, child-rearing, vocational demands, had arisen in their lives, they continued to express futility to a considerable degree in parent relationships. Their expressions of futility did not refer to childhood and adolescence but to adult years which included the period following graduation from college.

Close examination of all evidence of futility existing among these women in relation to their parents revealed various aspects of the problem. By analyzing the data on parent relationships, certain related factors can be seen.

*Parental demands set up lifetime habits of conformity* which seemed impossible for some of the women to break, no matter how much they consciously seemed to desire self-freedom. An attitude of hopelessness developed whenever a situation demanded a new type of behavior, and the woman was unable to change her old

habits. Illustrative of this point was the statement made by a thirty-year-old married woman: "I have always been under the supervision of my parents and probably always will be."

Habits of conformity can be broken down further into (a) *continued domination by parents* and (b) *prolonged overdependence of the woman* herself. Oftentimes it was difficult to determine which was the factor most closely related to the woman's feelings of futility—the parents' unrelenting need to dominate or her own deep-seated dependence on her parents. One young woman, married to a devoted husband, and possessing every potentiality for independent living, said, "Mother is sympathetic but Daddy is the dominating one in the family, so there is absolutely nothing I can do." Another statement was made by a woman whose father had indulged her every whim until marriage; "He [father] put me in such an unfair position when he did not help me financially after marriage, I was helpless to do anything about it."

In some of the histories *the futility which was experienced seemed related to the woman's lack of ability or techniques to cope with the parents*. Frequently she indicated that her skills for mastering situations did not seem as effective as those of her parents. As one young woman of twenty-seven said, "I have lost practically every argument with my father. I am never able to hold out. I am so weak I just have to give in." Another illustration of the woman's inadequacy in the face of overpowering parental skill is found in the following statement, "I just crawled more and more into my shell. I had no way of coping with her [mother]."

*A sense of obligation engendered by the parents often secured a binding relationship between the woman and her parents*. The woman who felt keenly obligated to her parents appeared to do little except bear the burden of a responsibility which seemed unreasonable to her. Illustrative of this is the following: "It is the parents' duty to see that children have the best opportunities rather than to be bowed down by obligations to their parents as I have been. All my life I have been forced by Mother to see that she has given up everything for me."

As one woman stated it: "I know Mother does not agree with me but I have to carry things out as I see them. I don't want to go against her, so what is there for me to do?"

*A sense of futility in certain of the women was associated with their parents' rejection of them.* To know that she was not wanted and never had been gave to the woman who realized this a feeling of hopelessness. Illustrating this point are the following: "They have always kept things from me." "I have never been a part of the family and I never will." "My home situation is hopeless." "I have never felt at ease with my parents and never will."

*Still another factor associated with futility in parent relationship was the recognition that older people's patterns of life are not easy to change.* The realization that change is scarcely possible in older people had both a positive and a negative effect. On one hand, acceptance of the inevitable seemed to help some of the women resign themselves. On the other hand, the hopelessness of the situation produced a marked sense of helplessness and futility. This feeling is illustrated by the following: "Mother tries to run my husband's life as well as mine. I can do nothing about it as long as she is with us." "I always resented these things in my parents but I knew I could do nothing else but accept them."

In certain cases *reference was made by the women to the parents' method of dealing with the grandchildren.* This seemed to cause fewer expressions of futility than other aspects of the parent relationship. Perhaps the familiar role of indulgent or strict grandparents made this problem more acceptable. Then, too, few of these women lived with their parents and so contacts were limited. Occasionally a woman would indicate that her parents were repeating the pattern of relationship with her children that had existed in her own early life.

The powerful effect of the parent-child pattern was demonstrated in this group of adult women by their frequent expressions of futility over relationships with their own parents. Even though these women no longer lived with their parents nor were actually dependent upon them, the restraint existed for them; hence futility was experienced as one reaction to this frustration. The impressionability of the developing child, the early establishment of parent-child relationships, the continued operation of these through-

out childhood and youth, and the retention of early habits of relationships laid the foundation for the adult pattern.

Helplessness in the face of new problems is to be expected; futility over time-worn frustrations reveals the need to develop new techniques and more effective ways of tackling difficulties. So potent and persistent a relationship as that which exists between parent and child needs the most effective understanding and re-education, if the errors of the past are not to be repeated. Findings of a study of this kind may be of little value for the group on which the study is made, or for others of similar age. Its value lies, however, in its implications for education and for women in the future.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Findings: On Sex Adjustment*

Perhaps it is less surprising for *forty of the women studied to show a sense of futility over their sex adjustment* than for the women to express futility over relationships with their parents. Recent studies of marital adjustment<sup>(3)(77)</sup> and earlier ones of the sex life of women<sup>(6)(19)(28)</sup> have indicated to what extent this problem exists.

From their histories, sex adjustment of each woman appeared to be a dynamic relationship as well as an integral part of her total personality configuration. For some, the early stages of marriage produced poor sex adjustment, but changes occurred which brought about a more satisfactory experience in time. Others who were married had begun their early sex lives with some degree of enjoyment but gradually lost this in later years. The relationship was not static but increased or decreased as an effective marital experience.

Many times the women did not seem to realize what the factors were which affected their sex adjustment; the interviewer often found it difficult to determine what was associated with this area of their lives. In most instances sex life was so integrated with the woman's total adjustment that associated factors were numerous.

The Victorian attitude toward sex had prevailed for most of these fifty women in their childhood upbringing. Many of them, during their college years or in subsequent reading, had gained a new concept of sexual adjustment for women. All seemed to accept intellectually the idea of a satisfying sex life for women as well as for men, but many seemed to revert to an emotional rejection of such a role. One could not but speculate as to the confusion of concepts which produced certain of the sex problems. One woman stated it this way: "I think we would be better off if, like our grandmothers, we expected nothing. Then we would not suffer such disappointment." Apparently their new knowledge had come

too late to affect the earlier established emotional response to sex.

Eight of the women had worked out thoroughly satisfying sex relations in their marriage, without any particular difficulty. Five others, after a considerable amount of poor adjustment and effort, evolved a good sex relationship with their husbands. Three women expressed indifference toward developing this aspect of their marital adjustment. The rest of the married women had many variations in their sex lives. Adjustment would be good, fair, or poor, depending upon many factors.

In order to classify completely the expressed futility in the area of poor sex adjustment, the total span of years married was considered. References to her frustration over the intensity of the experience, its lasting effect, the recurrence of maladjustment from early marriage to the present, the woman's general attitude toward her own sexual adequacy, as well as her present sexual adjustment, were noted. The total picture of her expressed feelings of futility over frustration in sexual adjustment served as the basis for her classification as to degree of feelings.

Among the single women three made no reference to their sex lives except to say when questioned, "I have no trouble," "Satisfactory," "No problems." Further questioning elicited no additional information. Whether they were too reticent or whether this aspect of living was too submerged to be faced was not determined. The other six single women had definite problems about which they expressed feelings of hopelessness. The divorcée referred occasionally to her sense of futility over the disruption of her marriage in which sexual adjustment played a part.

*Expressions of futility over sex adjustment seemed to be associated most frequently with the general adjustment of husband and wife.* This was true for nine of the women who expressed extreme futility, for six who expressed moderate feelings, and for three who expressed a slight degree of futility. For five of the women, frustration over sex adjustment seemed associated with their own personal adjustment. One showed this to a marked degree, three moderately, and one only slightly. In one case, extreme feelings of frustration in her sex life appeared to be associated with the woman's adjustment to her parents, who were antagonistic to any aspect of her sex life.



*Rejection of the sexual experience or of the husband in this relationship appeared as the most frequently associated factor.* Of those who revealed extreme feelings of futility with regard to their sex lives, six gave every evidence of rejecting the sex act. Two of the statements were: "Our early marriage was based entirely on sex and I could do nothing." "I feel always there is something wrong in this." Two others indicated rejection of the sex experience, one to a moderate and one to a slight degree. For six of the women, two expressing it to an intense degree, three moderately and one mildly, rejection seemed to be primarily of the husband—"He arouses no feeling in me nor will he ever." "He thinks of nothing but sex."

*Poor sex education or ignorance of physiological facts and techniques of adjustment appeared to be closely associated with feelings of futility* which were expressed in this area. Six of the married women who indicated extreme frustration revealed that ignorance and in some instances definite misconceptions about sexual experience had been contributing factors to their maladjustment. This occurred for two who expressed moderate feelings and for one whose frustration seemed mild.

Several other factors were associated with frustrated sexual experience. Three of the women felt hopeless about their *husband's inadequacy* to meet the demands of a normal sex life. One woman was unable to cope with her husband's *excessive sexual demands*. Two had *physical defects* which had not been corrected early enough to permit development of a normal sex life. Three of the women revealed that *fear of pregnancy* would always have a negative effect on their adjustment. Because of certain *religious conflicts within themselves* three felt frustration in their sex lives. *Premarital sex experience* reacted as a negative factor in marital adjustment for three of the married women.

Many of the women experienced more sex problems than this analysis would indicate, but only the problems which were associated with expressions of futility are used here.

The single women who indicated feelings of futility in their sex lives had somewhat different problems. Three were disturbed over their *premarital sex relations* which they believed would inevitably affect their subsequent marriages. One violently *rejected all men*. One felt hopeless because she had *not experienced the sex act*.

One woman's *professed ignorance of sex facts* was the source of much anxiety to her. Only one of this group revealed *homosexual experience*. Her moderate expression of futility concerned her inability to make a change in herself.

Most of these women had not entered marriage without some kind of sex education. A few of their colleges had offered courses; a number of the parents gave them frantic last-minute information as to the use of contraceptives; pamphlets and available books were obtained; and some of the women had sought medical advice. Where mothers had given realistic, sound, long-time education, and where husbands were intelligently alert to their own and their wives' need for real education, their sex adjustment seldom failed to work out satisfactorily ultimately.

Unfortunately the women of this group who looked for help did not always receive sound advice when they sought it. Some of their problems seemed to be magnified or even created by the advice they were given. The physicians, for it was usually a physician who was consulted, did not always realize the destructive effect their advice or attitudes made. For example, to be told to find sexual satisfaction with men other than her husband was shocking; to be told with great positiveness that the sex act must occur nightly was equally disturbing, especially if the experience was not usually satisfying. Unwillingness of the physician consulted to give corrective measures, even where the physical defects would inevitably interfere with sex adjustment, seems unbelievable when tragic results in the total marital adjustment might and did occur. When seeking advice in an area fraught with emotion and embarrassment, some of the single women were affronted by the physician's attitude of ridicule or his assumption that the only possible motive for the visit was "being in trouble." Undoubtedly such experiences would be less frequent today with the generally prevailing attitude more favorable to obtaining help for good sex adjustment.

None of the factors discussed in this chapter are discrete in themselves but overlap and interlock with the others. Although products of the 1920's and 30's, many of these women did not realize that sex adjustment depended on a number of things, only one of which was information, and that sex adjustment was a part of the total configuration of personal and social adjustment.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Findings: About Life in General*

Expressions of futility were usually classified according to experience areas because their meanings were definitely indicated. Some, however, did not relate directly to any one of these areas, but were vague or general. It became necessary to examine such statements carefully for their contextual meaning, and for all possible evidence pertaining to them. All expressions that remained indefinite in context were classified as "futility about life in general."

*Thirty-seven of the fifty women studied, or 74 percent, expressed feelings of futility about life in general.* These women could not be judged futile, ineffectual individuals by any objective standards; but from time to time they gave expression to general statements of futility which seemed to indicate state of mind rather than reaction to specific frustration.

Occasionally these general statements of futility alluded to conditions in the women's lives that seemed secondary to the general or main thought. For example, the following were not classified in specific experience areas but were taken as general expressions of futility about life:

"No, I am not what I want to be. I want to be less selfish and more understanding. I want to be a better mother. . . . I wish that in doing a better job of these things [homemaking, children] I would be all I wanted, but I don't know whether I ever will or not."

"I think of myself as having a definite function as a wife and a mother, but there are times when within myself I question whether I am doing anything really worth while for the world. I am belligerently feminist at times."

"Last fall I wanted to come and talk over my problems with someone, as they were so great they were almost more than I could bear. I feel the same about them now."

Expressions of futility about life in general can be roughly grouped into several divisions. The first division is composed of statements which pertain to the individual woman's *failure to find personal fulfillment or realization of self*. The following are illustrative of this type of expression about life in general:

"I need to work out a philosophy that will help. I don't know what I want or what I am trying to get."

"I am willing to do anything, but I am sure nothing can be accomplished."

"I will never get to do the things I would like to do, or do them as well as I would like to."

"I feel I have lived only half as much as I should have in almost everything in my life."

"She cried and then said, 'It seems so hopeless. I want to do something that justifies living.'"

"I begin to think life is so futile for me."

"My own life is in such a tangle that I feel little can be done."

"I want to get something out of life before I get too old."

The second division is made up statements which reveal that the women feel *futile over conditions touching or related to their lives*:

"I am not very optimistic about the world. I do not think most people get any great joy out of living. . . . There is always the danger of war." (1935)

"I rebel at my position in society. I feel the futility of this entire civilization."

In the statements making up the third division, the women expressed feelings of *futility because they seemed to consider themselves part of a class of people* and to identify with certain groups. The following statements illustrate these feelings:

"We are all more or less sophisticated in our crowd. . . . But I see very little chance of real happiness for many people. . . . For me, I can't see anything that would really help me."

"As I sat there and looked around the theatre, it seemed to me the audience was made up of social parasites. Perhaps the others think I

belong to this leisure class which represents the ineffectual and purposeless living of many women."

"Women over forty are all scrapped. . . . Their lives are faded. . . . Now the depression has taken away their last possibility."

The fourth and last grouping of statements deals with the extreme condition of utter futility. *Where complete hopelessness over one's life is shown, the contemplation of death seems all that is left.* These statements about suicide did not convey determination or desperation or anticipation of life after death, as has been found in some studies;<sup>(101)(112)</sup> they revealed an attitude toward life so hopeless that no other view seemed possible. The women gave no indication of actually planning suicide, but they seemed to experience such utter futility that the only possible alternative in their thinking was death. These statements illustrate their extreme futility in life:

"I reach the place so many times where it doesn't seem life is worth living."

"I often look about me and wonder why people continue to live. Many times I see no reason to live."

"Nothing could help bring me out of my troubles except jumping off the bridge."

"I have thought many times that I'd like to commit suicide."

Statements like the above were not made frequently. In cases where they expressed hopelessness to this degree, the women showed an aggravated condition of frustration. No one or two thwarted experiences produced such a reaction. The cumulative effect of thwartings in many areas and frustration of major life goals seemed to result in these suicidal expressions. The number of women who made such statements were few. *Five out of the entire group, or 10 percent, made reference to death as the only solution to their hopeless situation.*

*Fifteen of the women indicated marked futility about life in general.* They included in their statements all divisions of meaning: self-fulfillment, life conditions, class membership, and suicidal ideas. The eight histories showing *moderate* futility and the four-

teen indicating *slight* futility did not contain expressions concerning death.

*Thirteen of the women made no statements regarding life in general*, although they disclosed futility in many areas of experience. It is interesting to note that all but two of these thirteen women showed marked futility in only a few areas. However, although not expressing futility about life in general, these two indicated widespread feelings of futility, but in specific statements rather than in general ones.

Although a few illustrations in this chapter refer to futility about aging, relatively little has come out in the entire study. One factor may be that, on the whole, the women were young (median age 30.1) and hence had not yet been faced with this problem. A few of those approaching forty expressed futility because of age. One or two younger women verbalized their fears over the inevitability of losing youth and looks.

The evidence of futility for life in general might have been analyzed into more definite components, but the investigator believed that these expressions, taken as wholes, indicated feeling tones and attitudes toward life that were valuable. Retaining the statements in their entirety made possible more insight into a woman's life pattern when she expressed a complete configuration of hopelessness than when numerous and definite expressions of futility were added together, many of which might have been momentary and superficial.

To see intelligent, privileged, educated women expressing futility about life in general should be distressing—distressing not only to those who are responsible for shaping the policies of women's education but also to those who are concerned with reducing waste in human energy.

The findings of this study give only slight evidence that a sense of futility served as a satisfactory means of accepting the inevitable. Feelings of hopelessness, and often of despair, were in evidence rather than attitudes of resignation.

## CHAPTER IX

### *Six Life Histories*

Six of the fifty life histories are presented in this chapter. Each history must be viewed as a whole in order to afford understanding of an individual woman's goals, her techniques of adapting to frustration, and the resulting feelings of futility which relate to her total personality structure. To analyze case history data as in the preceding chapters must inevitably destroy the unity or oneness of a life pattern. In order to preserve the unique values of each life history, those in this study have been dealt with both as wholes and as parts of wholes. Since space does not permit the presentation of all cases, a selection of a limited number for purposes of illustration is herewith proffered.

The original histories are entirely too voluminous to print, hence condensations are given. Every effort has been made to preserve the structure of the original case. Detailed extraneous material having little if any bearing on the woman's goals, techniques of adaptation, and feelings of futility is omitted. Verbatim statements from each woman's history that reveal the matrix of her personal strivings and ambitions from childhood on, with their eventual structuralization, are together put in a condensation of her developmental record. Each narrative brings in the techniques which the woman used successfully or unsuccessfully in her adaptation to life situations. Each case reveals the expressions of futility which were made.

The six cases selected were submitted to two professional workers who, being familiar with the original data, might recognize any bias or oversimplification of the cases. Neither person had any connection with the present study but judged the cases on the basis of what he considered an accurate representation of the basic structure of the complete life history.

The histories were chosen to illustrate several points:

The first was to show that most of the histories revealed a *goal or configuration of goals* throughout the life pattern of the individual.

The second point was to show that in other cases *confusion or ambivalence of the women's life goals* appeared.

The third point was to demonstrate that the *techniques of achieving goals were an integral part of personality structure*. These techniques varied. Some were socially acceptable and satisfying; others were socially acceptable and unsatisfying. Some were socially unacceptable and satisfying, while still others were socially unacceptable and unsatisfying.

The fourth point was to bring out that *futility differs in degree* among the cases. Some histories illustrate extreme feelings of futility; others, moderate feelings; and still others, mild feelings.

The six cases presented here are illustrative of the types of histories used in the study, but are not typical or representative of the entire group, any more than one person can ever be typical or representative of the population from which he is selected. It is important to bear in mind that although every effort has been made to give detailed pictures of the women as individuals, these cases are only condensations of the rich resources of original case data.

In every case anonymity has been preserved. The woman's life pattern has been retained completely although the details are disguised.

#### HISTORY 1—AN EXEMPLARY LIFE

Alicia B. first visited the Center in the interest of a community drive of which she was chairman. Glowing accounts of her charm and ability had previously come to the interviewer. From the contact, it was obvious why she was such a popular and important person with so many people. She was a slender, feminine, smartly dressed woman with a poised, gracious manner. About her was a flattering air of deference, and yet an assurance almost inevitably found in people of executive ability.

After transacting her business, Mrs. B. made a few comments on the Center's valuable work. She said people needed a place to turn for help, and that she herself understood this need. She then made the following statements:



"As far as I am concerned, I have too many problems and they are in too great a tangle for anyone to help me."

"My own life is in such a muddle, I feel little can be done."

She hinted at one or two things, but appeared to be stating facts rather than asking for help. Mrs. B. said that her friends did not know these things about her life.

"Our friends look upon us as a model family. They think my life has everything in it to make for happiness. They know so little about me really, and I do not want them to know more."

Mrs. B. had evidently done a good job in creating this impression among her friends, for not once throughout her years of contact with the Center was there any indication from them that she was other than a happy, able, charming, and fortunate woman. Her name was always connected with some worth-while enterprise.

Alicia B.'s early life was spent in a small college town in the East. Her family was one of the oldest and probably the most prominent in the community. Both her paternal and maternal sides represented money and culture. Education was a part of the family background, but it was education derived from tutoring and travel rather than from college. She was vaguely conscious of the wealth and prestige of her family.

"My family, which has lived in the same town for generations, is more aristocratic and cultured than my husband's. His family belongs to the same community and is a respected farm family. I have found them extremely clannish and not social in the sense mine is. They feel that my husband and I should render homage to their entire family clan."

Alicia remembered her childhood as a gay, happy, carefree time. Her home was the center of social activities to which her friends were drawn. Playthings and play equipment were amply provided. Her parents often participated in the children's activities and play.

Her mother and father had an "ideal" married life. They were deeply devoted to each other and to their children. No conflict appeared in the home. Her parents made their home an active center of social life and they also led in all civic affairs. Alicia was sure no favoritism was shown by the parents for any of the three children, of whom she was the second child.

"Although I worshiped my father, I have been equally devoted to my mother. My father died when I was in college. Since then, I have leaned more on mother for help."

At another time, she explained that her father's death was the greatest blow of her life. She gave further evidence of her early attachment to her father by saying, "I would weep as a child whenever I knew my father was worried."

Alicia's history reveals her earliest behavior pattern as living up to

the expectations of others, especially her parents, and of gaining approval for this. She remembered her feelings of guilt in childhood whenever her behavior deviated from the parents' standards.

"I was always ready to say I was sorry. I felt bowed down by my sins."

"Whenever I was reprimanded, I was crushed. It was not necessary to punish me often because I tried so hard to do what was expected of me."

She recalled herself as a good, conscientious little girl who had model parents and a model home life, and who tried hard to be a model child. Her sisters' behavior showed much less conformity than hers, and they were a source of worry to the parents. Alicia B. was conscious of this difference. The three little girls clashed occasionally, but not, according to her, to any marked degree.

"I always had a desire to serve the world, from the time I was a very little girl." In this way she expressed her childhood philosophy. Mrs. B. remembered herself as an idealistic child who harbored a real feeling of service to humanity. She thought she was given a sweet childish faith in religion through her parents' efforts. She retained this faith until adult life. Her father's death brought a sharp reversal in her religious belief, as there seemed no justification for his going.

There was practically no recall of any unpleasant or difficult aspects of childhood. She liked school and was successful in it. She had many playmates, and her participation was both satisfactory and adequate. "I like people and they like me." Her reading interests were extensive and varied. As early as high school, she became absorbed in current affairs because of the stimulus of World War I.

"I think I am terribly unconscious of material things. I had what I needed and never was concerned whether others had more."

Money matters were seldom discussed in Alicia's home. She learned to spend wisely and to manage money carefully. She believed her father did great good with his money, and did everything possible for his family.

Her sex education she considered satisfactory. Her mother gave her a "beautiful" book which she thought set a nice attitude. She felt free to ask questions of her mother but believes she was not at all "sex conscious."

Alicia had many illnesses through childhood, adolescence, and her young adult life—some of which were very severe. She realized her family was sometimes apprehensive over the state of her health. She enjoyed the attention given her when ill, but thought illness in her family was treated sensibly and without undue fuss. In her young adult life several major operations were performed. She rated her health as *good* in childhood but going from this to *poor* in the present.

During adolescence, Alicia had a number of boy friends and enjoyed the popularity. She became engaged three different times, but only in one instance did she regret breaking her engagement. In her thinking, R. had become the man she should have married. Family opposition to him and a difference in religion prevented their marriage. She looked back on this as her real opportunity for a happy marriage. Family disapproval she gave as the chief reason for breaking her engagement.

Mr. B. was among her acquaintances at this time, but she looked upon him as a solid, good, respected person and not one with whom she could fall in love. Then Alicia married Mr. B. "on the rebound" from her love affair with R.

"B. was so good and kind I felt sure love would come. I married him, realizing full well I did not love him. I do not love him now. What makes it much worse is that he loves me with extreme devotion. I wish he did not, for that would make things easier."

Mrs. B. did not believe that she ever felt physically attracted to her husband. She accepted the sex experience in the first months of marriage "without pleasure but was not revolted by it." Six months after marriage a major operation left her in rather poor health which increased her distaste for sexual relations. The final wedge came in this relationship when she became pregnant a few months later.

"I had realized by then my marriage was hopelessly unsuccessful."

She faced this fact only shortly before she became aware of her pregnancy. She realized that having a baby would seriously complicate an already difficult situation. Alicia was frantic.

"I did not want a baby then. Of course, since I have had him, he has meant everything to me. Perhaps I have made him the recipient of my affection rather than my husband."

In these last few years sexual intercourse had been discontinued for long periods of time. Whenever it was resumed, it had been a revolting experience to Mrs. B. She regretted this exceedingly.

"It bothers me mentally that I cannot be satisfactory to him."

Later she said, "We have tried to resume sex relations after months of continence. This is so extremely distasteful to me that it is *impossible* now to make any change in this phase of our relationship."

Mrs. B. said that there were positive aspects to her marriage as well. Both she and Mr. B. had many friends whom they enjoyed. They were socially skilled and admired this in each other. The wife motivated much of their joint activity, but Mr. B. cooperated completely in all she did. As a family they participated in many outdoor sports too. They played games together and had much fun as mother, father, and child.

In her life outside the home, Mrs. B. was active in civic affairs. She became an outstanding leader in the community. Mr. B. was very

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proud of her for this. She seemed to enjoy the recognition, but not inordinately. At another time, when giving her philosophy of life, she revealed part of her motivation for this participation.

"I have always had a terrible conflict over feeling that I should help the world."

"The idea of service was built up in my home and then was emphasized in college."

"I had the constant example of my father and mother continually doing unselfish things to help others. I feel I have tried to follow the pattern and the ideals which my father has set, and these have been the motivating forces in what I have done."

"I could never have gone as far with my unhappy marriage unless I had felt I was living up to the standard that was set for me."

In conversation, Mrs. B. often expressed the desire to make a worthwhile contribution to life. An illustration of this is when she found that giving the necessary time for this study was almost too much for her. She thought it best to withdraw, so came with this question, "Can I really be of help to you: and if I do this, am I really contributing something worth while?" she asked intently. When emphatically assured that her contribution was necessary and important, Alicia B. decided to continue her participation and never again complained about the amount of time it required.

To present a front of ideal marriage to her friends was the goal toward which Alicia struggled constantly. She often referred to her marriage as being a failure, but she did not want others to realize it.

"I do not love my husband and never have. . . . I am a good wife to him. . . . I am making a desperate struggle to keep the family together. . . . He is now ill. . . . Mother knows the part I am playing in marriage and she understands. But she is in as much a dilemma as I am over finding an effective solution."

"If you would come into our home for an evening, you would think we were an ideally happy couple."

These statements were corroborated by observations the interviewer made of Mr. and Mrs. B. in their home and other social situations. Alicia was always thoughtful and considerate of him, deferring in many small ways. His devotion to her was evident from his concentration on her when she was present and his constant reference to her in conversation when she was not present. His comments were occasionally revealing. For example, "My wife has said that she will never divorce me for anything, unless I get too fat."

The idea of a divorce was almost impossible for Mrs. B. to accept. It violated all that she believed important for herself, even though she considered her marriage had become a hopeless failure. Gradually she found her technique of simulating a model life becoming intolerable.

The following statements were made at different times in the interviews:

"I feel now it will never be possible to achieve successful marriage in our case as certain essentials are lacking."

"I am playing an intolerable part of play-acting."

"I don't believe I can go on living as I now live."

"I reach the place so many times where it doesn't seem life is worth living."

About this time her husband developed a heart condition which was obscure and difficult to diagnose. This added to her sense of responsibility. She tried hard to rationalize the situation as she was thinking seriously of a divorce. To run out on her husband increased her guilt; to remain in the situation seemed impossible.

The conflict between maintaining her ego ideal as a model wife and mother, which she was doing artificially, and destroying the illusion of a satisfactory marriage for herself and others, cost her a great price. Her own recurring and persistent illness, which originated primarily from tension, indicated the depth to which this conflict had gone.

Her husband's illness and the threat of economic necessity, her own poor health, the pressure of innumerable community responsibilities which she shouldered in an effort to make a worth-while contribution to society, the fear of public opinion (censure), and her own failure to achieve lifelong aspirations presented a combination of circumstances to which she gave expression from time to time as follows:

"I have reached the point of just wondering if anything is worth carrying through."

"My husband's illness has been diagnosed, and I feel it is a hopeless situation."

"I must be prepared for work but, as it is, I am not fit to hold a job."

"If I had financial security, it would be easier. Life holds nothing for me now, and in later years it will hold less."

At one time, when asked, Alicia said, "My greatest fear is financial insecurity."

She also expressed her three chief wishes as follows:

"To have the love and affection of, and a home with, a man whom I love and who loves me. . . . To have the love and affection of my child and family [parental family]. . . . To do something in the world where I may make a contribution to society."

"It seems so hopeless. I want to do something that justifies living," she later said, crying.

When Alicia first mentioned the probability of divorce, an idea that had seemed impossible to her at first, she revealed some of her conflict.

"I cannot see leaving the secure for the insecurity of divorce. I am just a coward."

She began the first hesitant steps toward divorce when her poor health necessitated going to her mother's for care. She had gone home before when ill but apparently not with the thought of divorce. When told what she was doing, Mr. B. would not face such an irrevocable step. She explained to him her intense desire to do what was best for all three of them. She showed him where she sincerely believed herself to be bad for him. She had not measured up in sexual relations. She knew she was of an aggressive, dominant disposition, while he was a more submissive type, who always followed her lead and depended on her rather than on himself. Many times she referred to her dislike of the aggressive role she must always play with her husband. She thought her great desire to function in a more submissive feminine role could never be achieved. In all of this she brought in no recriminations, only a desperate intentness to bring about divorce in the best way possible.

She went to her mother's to regain her health and think through her plans. Shortly after this, a critical turn in Mr. B.'s health forced her into another decision. Should she return to aid him and postpone their ultimate separation or continue with her plans? The latter course would reveal to her questioning friends that she was walking out on her husband.

"I question if my husband's trouble can be relieved."

"I am discouraged about myself and feel that my plans have gone completely awry."

"I reach the place so many times where it doesn't seem life is worth living."

"I don't believe I can go on living as I now live."

The following is an excerpt from a letter written to the interviewer after seeing her husband: "In short, it seems as if everything I have done for the last thirteen years has been more or less futile and, what is worse, so far as my husband is concerned, wrong."

Later she wrote again, "like a squirrel in a cage, my mind has gone around and around trying to find some way in which I could return and continue my responsibility."

Eventually Alicia made her decision, after many months of rest and medical treatment for herself. She returned to care for her invalid husband and once again to establish an apparently secure and happy family life. His devotion to her, approval from her friends, and the sense of maintaining her responsibility seemed to bring her the satisfaction she needed. Mrs. B. did not re-contact the Center. When seen after this, she appeared quite serene. There was no further opportunity to record her expression of feelings.

. . . . .



This history was chosen to illustrate the individual who seems to have one main direction or set of goals in life. These goals which Alicia set for herself pointed toward the configuration of leading a model or exemplary existence. Her pattern of life was formulated early in childhood in accordance with satisfactions she found for herself, her needs as met by her parents and friends, and the circumstances of her life. All of her strivings and ambitions seemed to be correlated with or subordinated to this one main desire. Her need for approval, as well as her desire to contribute something worth while to the world, are integral parts of this basic drive. She expressed marked futility in being unable to realize her goals.

Alicia seemed to make an active and positive attack in resolving life's problems in the majority of instances. She drove toward her established goals over and over with tremendous effort and subordinated practically every counterdemand in an effort to realize the desired end. Futility was expressed because of the impossibility of achieving, according to her perfectionist standards, the goals she had set for herself. Interestingly enough, she seemed capable of shifting and changing her techniques, but in her case it was the goal itself, threatened by the circumstances of her own life, that she was unable to meet.

If she continued to play the part of the model wife and to give to the world a picture of ideal marriage, she could never really achieve success in a happy marriage because her relationship with her husband prevented it. If, on the other hand, she sought a divorce to get out of her difficult marriage, she would have to acknowledge to the world her failure to achieve a successful marriage. It was inevitable that she could not gain her particular goals without experiencing failure one way or another.

The anomalous position in which Alicia found herself made the achievement of these main goals impossible. She did not seem able to modify her goals, even after repeated failure to achieve them. Hence, she showed marked futility.

Alicia made most of her expressions of futility about *life in general*. She had failed to achieve that which was her basic direction from childhood on. Her other expressions of futility centered about the areas of *crises* of which she had many; *her own health*

which was very poor; feelings about her own inadequacy and over-aggressiveness in certain relationships. In *sex adjustment*, Alicia's conflict over this experience, rejection of her husband, and the responsibilities of a wife in marriage resulted inevitably in futility for her. In spite of the idealistic picture of her childhood, evidence in her subsequent history revealed inadequate sex education. One other interesting area of futility was her *hopelessness over her husband's adoration* of her. This was quite the opposite of many of the other cases in which the husband's lack of recognition was the problem. This very factor increased the sense of guilt over her basic failure in marriage. Had Mr. B. failed to give her understanding, sympathy, and recognition, she might have justified her own antagonism toward him.

The summary of goals for the above case is as follows: To plan a constructive way of life, to have a conscious philosophy and try to follow it (11);\* to conform to social opinion and expectation (13); to contribute something worth while to society (21); to achieve success as a wife (16).

#### HISTORY 2—HERSELF INVIOLEATE

"I wondered if I really wanted to get married because I thought I would have to give up being myself," young Mrs. S. explained to the interviewer in her usually direct and pleasant manner, though a trifle more intensely.

"I knew I would have to give up my name and probably my job if I married. I could not help but think of a husband as a necessary evil. Somehow, marriage always appeared to be a captain-first-mate affair. But when I met S., I had no question about marrying him. I loved him."

Mildred S. revealed the above while giving her history for the study of college women. She learned of the study through her alumnae group and was one of the first women to participate. Months of nothing but housework had failed to challenge her, so she began to seek outside interests. Her husband knew of her cooperation with the Center, and did not object. Over a period of five years Mildred contributed her history, as the material was requested. At no time did she ask for service. Apparently any benefit that came to her was derived from the stimulation of these contacts.

Mildred's history disclosed that childhood for her was a happy time.

\* Numbers refer to goals listed in Chapter V.

Being the only girl in a family, with three brothers and adoring young parents, gave her considerable status. She thought of herself as an important member of the family, with rights and considerations all her own.

"Mother always said I must remember I was their *only* daughter. She let me know that what I did was about right, and wanted me to have my own ideas and beliefs."

"I was undoubtedly the Crown Princess in the family. I know I was the favorite with my grandparents and relatives, even though there were several other grandchildren."

"I got everything I wished but when I did not, I used a technique which always produced results. My nose bled easily; so when it bled, I always screamed for attention. I even found I could induce nose-bleeds!"

Mrs. S. thought her parents were unusually happy.

"My mother had a very marvelous personality, an excellent disposition, and she was quite the extroverted type. She was modern in her ideas, and did much as she pleased in the Midwestern community in which she lived, regardless of conventions. She was the first woman to smoke in the dining room of the B—— Hotel."

"I once reprimanded Mother for not behaving with sufficient dignity. She was only amused." During early adolescence, Mildred became very critical of her mother's pleasure-loving attitude and freedom of behavior.

"We were more like sisters than mother and daughter. She was the all-permeating influence in my life. I think of her often. She was also the disciplinarian in our home."

"I once recall Dad's making a futile attempt to discipline me. It failed, and he never tried again. I became increasingly fond of him during early adolescence. He was a very attractive man and was devoted to Mother. He admired everything she did. Do you know my husband is very like my father?"

Mrs. S. felt socially and economically secure in her parental home. "Somehow, I always knew I had money back of me."

"I had my own room and my own things. The boys too had their own things but they shared a room. We never encroached on each other." There was ample play space and equipment, both indoors and out. She was allowed great freedom in play within her own home and that of her grandparents'. As a young child, her playmates were chiefly cousins. She shared her playthings, as did the others.

"We quarreled a lot, but I got over that early. Later on, one of the girls in the neighborhood became my rival in everything, and we remained so for years. We both were leaders. I have never really shaken that feeling about her."

"I always felt important in school." Mildred S. did superior school work. Besides this, she received certain special privileges. In one elementary school which she attended, her aunt taught; and in another school, an aunt was the principal. For one thing, she was allowed to sit in the schoolroom at her own request when the other children had to go to the playground.

In describing herself as a child, Mrs. S. said, "I wanted to be liked."

She recalls her early life as busy, active, and happy. For years she prayed every night for a "pleasing personality, a sense of humor, and good looks." At one time during early adolescence, she felt neglected. She imagined herself an adopted child, but this was only a passing phase. She was popular and active in all kinds of school and social activities. In her senior year she was editor of the high school annual, a much covered place.

Mildred S. failed to pass the entrance examinations to one of the large Eastern women's colleges. (This was interesting in light of her extremely high intelligence score taken for the present study.) In her history, she gave little indication of having been disturbed unduly by the failure. However, twice when scheduled to take her intelligence test, she postponed it because of illness. She laughingly commented afterward, "My subconscious self must have been afraid for me to take that test." (She ranked above the 99th percentile for college women on the Detroit Advanced Intelligence test.) She then entered a Midwestern girls' school. College work was easy for her, as a 3.52 average (4 A) would indicate. She had a gay social time as well. It was necessary to change colleges several times—once following her mother's death, again to be near an aunt, and again to keep house for her father.

Mrs. S. indicated that the most severe crisis in her life was the death of her mother, which occurred during her sophomore year in college. Adjustment to this was difficult as she felt her loss intensely. She found it hard to reconcile the loss of her young beloved mother. As a means of helping to adjust to this crisis, she went to live with an aunt for a few months before she returned to keep house for her father and attend college at home. At this same time, her father suffered financial reverses, making Mildred realize she must learn to be self-supporting.

(In giving this part of the history, Mrs. S. did not indicate any unusual emotional disturbance over making these adjustments. However, in discussing her father's remarriage, she showed much more feeling and conflict.)

"I deeply resented my father's second marriage. It seemed disloyal to my mother's memory. Besides, I had felt I was all-sufficient to him when I was not. Even though they [father and stepmother] urged me, I would not live with them. My presence was not necessary to them, and I knew that."

After her father's second marriage, a fair adjustment was made between Mrs. S. and her stepmother, especially after the little half-brother's birth. She tried always to maintain friendly relations.

"I never wanted to be a spare tire," said Mildred, when discussing her social relationships. "I usually had beaux and a good time, but I never wanted to feel others were pulling me along with them."

"I used to think the men I went with were lame ducks. So often the men who liked me were not the ones I liked. At times, I wondered if I would ever marry, but that was only when I felt down. But, ultimately, the thing which bothered me most was the fear of marriage—the fear that I would give up being myself."

"I broke my engagement with one man who annoyed me terribly by having so little respect for women's intelligence."

"I fear there was an element of gold-digging in some of my affairs," she laughingly said when discussing her relationship with men.

Mildred sidestepped marriage until she met Mr. S., but from then on, she felt confident that he was the man for her to marry.

"In spite of my attitude, I think I wanted to marry because marriage gives status. I recall once seeing a tombstone of an elderly woman who had never married. It gave me a shudder. But when I came right up to marriage, I said to myself, 'Do I want to get married or don't I?'"

"The thing I most wanted in marriage was to have someone around whom my world would revolve and whose world would revolve around me," Mildred said at another time.

"It has disturbed me that we are not vital enough to each other. There is not enough challenge in our marriage."

"My marriage is too static and not challenging enough. Maybe if I had children or a job outside the home, I would not feel this way."

"I now realize there can be no complete and total understanding between people, even in marriage."

"I would give anything to go back into work, but my husband will never be willing for me to do this."

After marriage, Mildred S. gave up an interesting, challenging job because her husband urged it. She then turned to housekeeping which soon palled on her when the necessary techniques and skills were mastered. Although she had been married three years when she first came to the Center, they had no children. She often said during the interview, "I want to fill my time with something worth while."

"Housework, to the exclusion of everything else, is not important enough for a woman to devote her entire time to."

"I would be much more useful as a person doing an interesting job than scrubbing the bathroom floor," she added vehemently.

Mrs. S. often referred to housework as time-consuming and deadly. She was skillful and a good manager but disliked the routine. Cooking

was interesting and gave her a chance to be creative. Mr. S. enjoyed entertaining and was very proud of his wife's skillfulness in this direction, but she felt differently.

"Maybe I am lazy, but I could do without so much entertaining at home. S. wants this, so I do it."

In many other ways Mildred gave evidence of making active adjustments in marriage. Few conflicting situations were allowed to remain so if she could do anything about them.

"S. was an only child, and it took him some time to learn that others had to be considered. For instance, he wanted to have his dinner whenever he felt like it—whether it was five o'clock or nine. That was hard on food and my disposition. Nagging did not help. I finally planned a late regular hour for dinner and each evening when the time came, served and ate my dinner alone, if necessary. There was no fussing. I simply set aside his food for him. After a few times, he joined me with no further conflict."

"I think it is better for me to do all the housework without any help from my husband rather than to insist that he make adjustments in this. I did resent looking after his personal needs and waiting on him when we first married. I felt he should take his share of the load, but we worked that out all right."

Their friends, for the most part, were chosen from among the people her husband enjoyed. She saw her other friends, those of her former life and for whom he did not care, during the day.

"The thing we most enjoy is an evening when we have a long, rousing-good argument. We have many pet themes. A never-failing one is religion. We will never have any real religious conflict unless there are children. I think we would have a number of differences to settle then."

"My religion is not very orthodox, but I would like to have some way of giving outward expression to my religious feelings. S. has an orthodox religion but he does not follow it."

"I did believe in immortality but, since Mother's death, I am definitely sure there can be no such thing. After death, I will not exist," were statements she made at another point in giving her history when she was questioned on her beliefs.

The S.'s had no children. At first Mildred wanted to avoid pregnancy because of financial stringency. In their second year of marriage she became pregnant, but miscarried at three months. At two other times Mildred was positive she was pregnant, but both of these were false. Occasionally regret was expressed over not having children, but no marked depression or despondency appeared. She indicated that her marriage would have been more challenging had there been children.

After eight years of marriage, she said: "I think children would

Mildred S. was an attractive-looking young woman of thirty-two years when she offered to give her history. There was always a quick and alert, but somewhat nervous, manner about her. She laughed easily and spoke fluently. During her five years of contact with the Center, she never once changed her cooperative role to that of help-seeking. She was poised at first contacts and developed more as the years passed.

The friends of Mrs. S. admired her greatly and looked to her for leadership. She was popular with both men and women. A little haphazard in her method of doing things, she was forgiven by her friends because of her quick, clever approach which always brought results.

Mildred S. lived a satisfying, constructive life which could scarcely be judged by any objective standards to be a futile one. In spite of this, she expressed futility—not much, but some.

. . . . .

The case of Mildred S. illustrates a person who expresses a minimum of futility. Her techniques of adaptation were positive, dynamic, and active. Her background of training and experience seemed to help her acquire ways of adapting to frustration, which not only brought her satisfaction, but made her socially acceptable.

Mildred S.'s goals were clear-cut and consistent. From childhood on she held a unique position in the family. She was the only girl. Her status, to use her own words, was that of the "Crown Princess" in a secure, happy home. She was "somebody." Her room, her position, and she herself were not encroached upon by anyone. Her relationships with her family, and with her friends, helped to build this attitude and to maintain it.

As we follow Mildred S.'s development in each new experience demanding adaptation, we find she sought her place of importance and inviolability. Such statements as "I never wanted to be a spare tire" and "I never wanted to feel others were pulling me along" would indicate this. Her expressed fears that marriage meant "I would give up being myself" bore out her feelings of the need to remain herself.

Mildred S.'s feelings of futility were expressed mildly, but they occurred where she had been unable to achieve completely her life goals. In marriage, she had not retained entirely her role of

"Crown Princess." She had many satisfactions in being a wife and companion, but the meaning of her own life, as structuralized early in childhood, was not fully satisfied. Her standards of being a good wife required effort to maintain. Her inability to have children necessitates resolving this frustration. Her husband's unwillingness for her to work and his need to hold the role of "only" child are undoubtedly important factors in her struggle to reach her life goals.

Mildred S. expressed futility because she failed to be completely what she had set out to be. Her goals were clear, not confused. For the most part, she had achieved these basic goals; hence her feelings of futility were mild. However, her repeated efforts failed to help her gain her unmodifiable goal.

The summary of goals for Mildred S. is as follows: To remain herself an individual inviolate (6); to achieve success as a wife (16); to aspire to professional success (19); to dominate, control, or manage (1).

### HISTORY 3—AN INSECURE LIFE

Barbara F.'s life presented such a confused picture of childhood changes and upheavals that she found difficulty in recalling it. During the months when her history was taken, she remembered more and more of the details of her life, but frequently she sought confirmation of this early history from relatives and friends.

Her father died a few months after her birth. Her grief-stricken young mother took Barbara home to live with her eldest sister, with whom she had made her home prior to marriage. "Nannie," whose own children were married, turned to her sister's baby with the same passionate devotion she had always given this younger sister.

Barbara's every wish was granted, mostly by "Nannie." Her baby charm ensured her the attention of everyone coming into the circle of family and friends. This was accentuated by the sympathy felt for the fatherless little girl.

As Barbara developed, her mother became the most beautiful and beloved of all people to her. Sometimes a remoteness about her mother vaguely troubled the child, but this was quickly forgotten whenever she could capture any attention from her. Later in life, she realized this remoteness was grief. But with an increasing circle of admiring relatives and friends, Barbara derived many satisfactions.

"Nannie" took over the responsibility for her discipline, which was



none too consistent. In some things she was strict and in others, lenient. There was also interference from numerous relatives, both paternal and maternal. In this, she sensed family disagreement and began to take advantage.

"I was a naughty child. 'Nannie' tried to teach me, but when I wanted to do anything, I went after it until I got it. Even though I knew I might be punished, I still found ways to get what I wanted. 'Nannie' was so good and kind, I should have been ashamed. Whenever I did not like what she did, I could turn to my other relatives for indulgence. In time, I became increasingly aware of the antagonism among my relatives."

Just before she entered school, Barbara sensed excitement in the air at home. Her mother left on a few days visit, and then "Nannie" explained to her that she had a new father, who wanted Barbara and her mother to live with him.

From the beginning of this chapter in her life, she was blissfully happy. She adored "Papa." She missed "Nannie," but the added attention Barbara had from her mother and new father made up for this. Her half-grown stepbrother, who visited them frequently, added to her sense of importance. Like other children, she now had a mother, father, brother, and real home life. The family squabbles faded into the background. Her stepfather brought consistent discipline into her life, and she gained a great sense of security from this.

"He could have made a nice child out of me. I resisted at first, but not for long, for he was so gentle with his firmness."

Barbara had one year of this kind of life, then fate again took a hand. Her mother died suddenly of an acute illness. Once more the relatives offered her sympathy and exaggerated attention, but she clung desperately to her grieving stepfather. She heard vague hints of "money" and "inheritance," but these meant nothing to her. Within the year her stepfather died, unable to rally from his grief.

Once again Barbara went home to "Nannie." This time she realized full well her deep loss. She also recognized "Nannie" was not well, though as adoring as ever. Barbara was allowed little freedom to play with friends.

"I had to sit on the front porch rather than play and skate with the children. 'Nannie' was old-fashioned and strict about me then. I was with adults most of the time. I wanted so to be one of the gang. I recall taking some money from 'Nannie's' purse, buying candy with it, and distributing it among the children. I realize now I was trying desperately to gain their attention."

At this time Barbara sensed a gathering storm among her relatives. Some of them took her aside and warned her against "Nannie." Others told her that "Nannie" would look after her interests better than

anyone. Over and over, she heard words like "inheritance," "heir," "guardian," and "legal steps." All this was bewildering and confusing, and added to her feeling of uncertainty.

Emerging from this, came the knowledge that she had a new kind of importance. Being the center of attention because of her adorable baby ways changed to being the center of interest because of her "money." It was less satisfying, but at least a substitute. Other little cousins had come on to claim the center of attention. She even sensed the jealousy of their parents toward her, although she did not know it for jealousy then. Their negative comparisons of her were overheard. Only a few remained loving and kind.

"Poor sick 'Nannie' never failed me, but she seemed less and less to understand my needs."

At twelve years of age, Barbara was bundled off to boarding-school. She loathed the idea, but was told the "decision" had been made. She learned to dread the family "decisions" given to her. She remained in boarding-school six years.

"For the first time in my life, I began to feel really inferior. The girls were rich, snobbish, and far more sophisticated than I. I felt funny and childish. That was when I first began to withdraw and live in a world of my own. The headmistress did not understand me and thought me terribly spoiled. I hated being there."

Three years later, "Nannie" died. This was the final break in her security. She was called on to make many choices and decisions then. The inevitable breach came between the two sides of her family.

"I dreaded the decisions forced upon me as I feared making somebody mad. I always tried to do what would keep peace on both sides. These were terrible ordeals. No inexperienced child should be forced to make decisions for which she had no experience and which would affect her entire life."

Guardians were appointed, property settled, personal belongings disposed of, and Barbara returned to boarding-school.

"That was when I first began to be lonely. I have been lonely so much of my life since then. I was desolate when I returned to boarding-school."

"Up until 'Nannie' died, I guess I had been a happy-go-lucky child. That all changed then. I began to worry and to turn my thoughts inward. I guess I talked a lot about myself."

Then another "decision" was made to change Barbara's school, as the family thought it might be better for her. Much as the child hated the boarding-school, she hated leaving it. From then until she graduated from college, she attended two other schools. These were chosen for her both times, always with the idea of helping her make a better adjustment.

"I got worse all the time. College was a nightmare for me, and yet I hated to leave it as much as I had hated to stay."

Barbara received little if any help in college with her poor adjustment. She knew people did not like her for she did not interest them. They were bored with her constant talk of herself. She was not popular with boys although she longed to be. Her attention was forced to her inheritance from time to time as family conflict continued over this. Her "estate" began to bring her some slight measure of satisfaction.

The one continuing bright spot in Barbara's life was the daughter of her mother's college chum. Diana was a girl whose life had been secure. She was charming and experienced in all that the younger girl had missed. Diana became Barbara's guiding light. She spent all vacations with Diana and her family. This caused further family complications. Barbara always tried to appease but was never satisfied with results.

Barbara made her first contacts with the Center in an effort to obtain help for herself. She was miserably unhappy and was groping for some way out.

"I really have nothing to live for," was a statement made early in her Center contacts.

"I have never wanted to work, nor do I now. Above all, I want marriage. I really want a home and babies. I don't think I want the companionship of a husband as much as I want the home. He would be the necessary means to an end."

"I think Diana is right. I am an impossible person. Why should I expect to find a man who would be interested in me?" she said at another time.

After leaving college, Barbara taught. Her struggle in this was serious. She believed her principal thought her incapable of doing the job. She felt intense antagonism from her co-workers. Her preparation for this work was inadequate.

The conflict with her relatives had increased. She felt less and less accepted by them and more acutely aware of their constant criticism. She believed that even Diana was becoming disgusted with her. This threat was terrifying. Diana's frank talks with her were taken as rejection rather than as efforts to help her.

"She says I talk about myself all the time. I guess I do but I can never think of anything else to say. Maybe the people I live with feel the same way about me."

The adjustment to living in a residence club had proved difficult for Barbara. She complained of her physical surroundings, of the living habits of others, and that she was more often than not excluded from their social activities. Reports of her indicated that she talked inces-

santly about herself. People in the club were disgusted by her frequent references to her "income" and "investments."

In discussing why she did not make social adjustments easily with this living group, she said, "I always feel more secure with older people than with those my own age."

"I feel lonely a lot of the time." In spite of this, she could not face making a change to another living situation when the chance came, even though it seemed far more attractive. She clung desperately to the residence group in spite of having established no satisfactory ties with them.

A real crisis came in her life when the school principal put her on probation in her job. Barbara recognized that her work habits were poor. She overemphasized perfection of certain details, but was not good in over-all organizing. In this, as in everything, she was indecisive.

In trying to analyze her assets as well as liabilities, Barbara reluctantly admitted that she was considered pretty by her family and friends. She felt she dressed well and made a reasonably good appearance. She believed her disposition was good, as she rarely became angry with others. She was interested in people, but concluded that she seldom showed this.

"I will do anything for anyone I like although I never think of the nice thoughtful things that others do. I wish I could be more like Diana. I know she is disgusted with me."

Throughout her interviews, Barbara frequently gave expressions of futility, such as the following: "I often look about me and wonder why people continue to live. Many times I see no reason to live."

"Nothing can help bring me out of my troubles except jumping off the bridge."

The threat to her job caused such great anguish that she seemed incapable of making any improvement. Whenever she could find anyone to listen, she talked of her troubles incessantly.

"I feel I will never succeed in anything. I will just be a failure."

"If I had lost this job, I am sure I would have jumped in the lake," she said, in looking over the averted crisis.

Barbara righted herself over the job with tremendous effort and also while having some assistance at the Center. She had a measure of success, so was able to move to a new position without feeling that she had departed as a failure. Later she had great difficulty in accepting a new place even though the offer was attractive.

"I hate to give up my present job even though this other sounds grand. I know you think I am silly after all the things I have said about this situation, but I would much rather stay right here. I dread going."

She expressed her greatest fear in the following way: "I am most afraid of not measuring up to what I want to do for myself."

quate techniques, only to have failure followed by a sense of marked futility. The areas of experience around which her expressions of futility centered were *life in general*, *crises*, *her own feelings of inadequacy*, and the *friends* whom she sought but could never have.

The goals for Barbara seem to be as follows: To cling to security (10); to seek admiration and adulation (8); to attain marital status (14); to experience parenthood (15); to acquire social skill, poise, and ease (20); and to attract and make close friends (12).

#### HISTORY 4—GRACIOUS LIVING

"My life would not make an especially good study for you as it runs so smoothly, almost too smoothly, I might say. You could scarcely find a family where there is less friction than ours. My husband is devoted, my children are a never-ending source of joy, and our home is a haven for us all. I feel that ours is gracious living and as such is exceedingly important."

The young woman who sat across the desk and made this statement gave substance to her words by her serene manner. The measured cadence of her words and the absence of any apparent nervous tension produced an effect of genuine poise.

Emily H. learned through her college alumnae association of the study of college women being made at the Center. She offered her services with the above statement and then began giving the preliminary information. Majoring in English and philosophy, she graduated from a large Western university with an average of 3.0 (A 4).

Emily H. earned her entire way through college and because of this stepped into an excellent job when she graduated. Her work continued for two years until she decided to give it up and marry Mr. H., a struggling young architect. She realized their income would be low and precarious, but the gamble seemed worth taking as she loved him devotedly. He too was a college graduate. His work necessitated frequent moves in early marriage. It was difficult to be always moving out of a home they loved, but she soon saw that living in a house enhanced its value. To move into an old, rundown house, make it livable, and sell it soon became one way Emily could boost the family finances.

Mrs. H. found it difficult at first to give up a lucrative job at the time of marriage, but she believed her husband's sense of importance should not be threatened by her working. She found great satisfaction in helping him build his own business by re-doing old houses. She did this in a way that would not hurt him. He expressed to her privately great pride

capacity for new ideas and showed considerable imagination. Mrs. L. had no interest in any of these and made no effort to simulate any.

She spoke of their incompatibility of interests, blaming her husband for his lack of interest in reading and lectures. She felt he should have more desire for "intellectual" improvement.

When discussing the problem of her husband's drinking, not once did she indicate any part she might play in it. As she related her marital problems, she would qualify the force of the statements but never indicate that she had any insight into herself.

The two children, a boy nine and a girl five, gave her little pleasure. Her responsibilities as a mother weighed on her and were annoying to her. She often said how glad she would be when the little girl was able to go to school. Mr. L. was devoted to the children, but they were not responsive to him.

"I wish my children were more affectionate. I have never been, and I see they are just like me. I wish I knew how to make them change. I think the children are just like that [unresponsive], and it cannot be helped."

She went on to say that Mr. L. was an affectionate person, but neither she nor the children responded to him. In her own childhood she had never expressed any affection toward her mother, nor received any. It was different with her father, whom she adored.

Frances admired her father more than anyone she knew. She constantly compared Mr. L. to him, to her husband's disadvantage. Her father had always babied and pampered her. Her husband did not. Her father always saved her hardships and protected her. Mr. L. expected something different from her. Her father was a very successful businessman with a large income. He was looked up to by people. He did much social good. He gave gifts freely. He did not drink. In all of these, Mr. L. fell short.

"My father is the only person toward whom I feel affectionate. He does so much for me—how could I help it?"

When she was questioned about her sex adjustment in marriage, Frances L. answered quickly that this was "perfectly satisfactory." In fact, she thought it had been too important in marriage when other essentials were lacking.

As her contacts continued at the Center, a different story of sex adjustment was revealed. About this time, a college friend of hers accused Frances of giving Mr. L. a bad deal in marriage. Apparently, the directness and frankness of this discussion brought her face to face with the reality of her situation for the first time.

"Maybe she was right. I just never thought of it that way. I realize I was not ardent enough for him when I married, nor have I ever been." (She implied, nor would she ever be.)

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From early marriage, Frances found sexual relations difficult. In her first responses, she was mildly acquiescent. Then gradually she began to reject her husband's advances. Months at a time would pass without their having intercourse. Frances felt vaguely uneasy about her husband, but was glad to be relieved of these unpleasant demands for as long a period as possible. She had reassured her own misgivings by the idea that "our early relationships were based too much on sex." The direct criticism of the friend made her question her long-established rationalization.

Finally Mr. and Mrs. L. talked over this problem together and he indicated great bitterness over their failure in sex adjustment. She was utterly amazed at his feelings and as a result felt that she had to make some adjustment.

Her approach to the problem was the same she had made to every situation, a half-hearted one. To the suggestions given her, she responded dubiously. Together with these, she was given some insight into herself and into her husband's needs.

"I never feel the courage of my convictions and I never feel I am right any more," Frances said after she had tried to bring about a change in their marital relations. "At present, I feel unable to succeed in anything." A few weeks later, she made the following statements: "I feel very despondent about our affairs. My husband has said frankly that he no longer has the interest in me that he did." "My marriage is such a failure. What can I do? What *can* I do?" "I find it practically impossible to express affection."

Mrs. L. found difficulty in discharging many of her responsibilities as a wife and mother. The care of her children, entertaining, the management of the home (with one good servant) required greater effort than she seemed able to give.

"I wonder if I am suited to my vocation, homemaking."

"I think I really hate to take responsibility. You may laugh, but I have always hated having to put out the empty milk bottles at night."

Frances L. could recall taking little responsibility as a child. Her mother was the dominant one of the two parents and disciplined the children almost entirely. She was not severe, but showed her disapproval without hesitation. There was much antagonism between Frances and her mother.

"I felt much closer to Father. Mother says I was a terrible child. As a little thing, I was spoiled and disagreeable."

Her earliest memories are about her parents and are revealing as follows:

"I can remember playing with a flannel petticoat of Mother's and cutting holes in it. When she questioned me, I flatly denied it. Mother



sat down, took me in her lap, and explained about fibbing and why I should not do this. Nevertheless, I continued to fib to get myself out of difficulty."

"We moved, and I can recall riding on the street car to the new house with my father. I was quite afraid of the ride but I felt a sense of protection in sitting next to my father and holding his hand."

Frances L.'s childhood was uneventful. She had one younger sister with whom she played. They were not especially close to each other. She wished for very few things that she did not receive. There was plenty of play equipment and little supervision of play. The household regime was strictly maintained and the children were forced to conform to their mother's systematic organization.

"I used to argue an awful lot with Mother but never with anyone else."

"I got along well with other children because I was never aggressive enough to interfere in their play."

"I have always liked people and gotten along with them because I have never demanded my own way."

As she advanced into adolescence, she began to feel socially inadequate. She lacked the facility to talk with ease. A tendency to acne caused her much embarrassment. Her family seemed unable to help her through this period.

"I was never popular. Boys showed no interest in me. I felt I could do nothing about it."

It was this very inexperience that attracted Mr. L. to her. His associates were among a sophisticated, blasé group for which Frances was a good antidote. She came from a good substantial family, attended a small select women's college, and also was given the cultural advantages of travel. Her naïveté and innocence attracted him but were the characteristics which later disturbed him most.

Mrs. L.'s sex education was meager and negative. She recalled with much embarrassment some early childhood play that had been treated in such a way by her mother as to cause considerable guilt. Other vivid memories indicated that she had experienced anxiety and embarrassment during college.

"I would like to gain poise but I don't know how to do it." Frances expressed feelings like this often, but never seemed to have the vaguest idea of what she could do to help the situation.

"My husband would like me to be clever and amusing, but I am not," she remarked bitterly one day.

As her contacts with the Center progressed, Mrs. L. talked less and less of her husband's drinking problem and brought out more and more their general adjustment. She did not consider his problem solved, but others became more important to her.

"Do you know his drinking has not existed this week, but I feel sure this change will not last."

Money always caused conflict in the home. Mrs. L. did not think her husband earned enough, nor did he think so. In the face of this, she considered him entirely too extravagant. He felt guilty about it. Her father supplemented their income every year, a matter Frances continually threw up to her husband.

She asked at the Center for a budget plan which she hoped might make him recognize his errors. Interestingly enough, the budget indicated that her household expenses were the most grossly extravagant items of all. She offered in a martyrlike fashion to reduce drastically the spending and to cut their standard of living. Mr. L. replied that he did not believe such steps were necessary, but that it was up to him to earn more. He seemed disturbed that it had been necessary for Mrs. L.'s father to supplement their income, but he did not appear to resent it much as she resented his low income.

"I am discouraged over our sex relations" was heard many times.

"My marriage may improve, but I am sure neither of us will get out of marriage what we want."

"I need to work out a philosophy of life that will help. I do not know what I want or what I am trying to get."

In answer to a question about the things she wanted most in life, Mrs. L. said, "First of all, I want to be beautiful and charming, and to accomplish all of the things that I have wanted to be. I want to make people like me well enough to accept me."

"Second, I want to be loved by my husband and children. I want to be a help to them, to be of some use in the world, and to accomplish something. I do not want to be a drawback to them."

"Third, I want money. If I had other things, I would not care about money but for me I believe it is essential."

She feared "not making the right kind of a home for our children, and also that L.'s drinking might become worse."

The ups and downs of her daily living brought out in her interviews the following statements:

"It makes me cross to think so many things have slipped by me without my realizing what I was missing."

"I feel almost everything is wrong."

"Oh, it seems hopeless. I don't think that there is anything I can do about it." [Adjustment with husband.]

"It really does not seem worthwhile to do much of anything. Last year—it was like a challenging game—but now it has all slipped back. I really am not interested any more." [In making a good adjustment.]

"I don't know whether I can go on making adjustments or whether it is worth it."

About this time, Frances discovered she was pregnant. Her feelings over this were frantic. She considered her marital adjustment too poor to be complicated by another baby.

"I just cannot go on this way. I just cannot go on."

She eventually adjusted to the pregnancy and seemed to establish a fairly good relationship with the family. Her husband's solicitous attitude and her children's thoughtfulness of her during this period were appealing to her. During her stay in the hospital when her baby girl was born, she had the most satisfactory relationships with her husband that she had experienced in years. "He behaved splendidly all the time I was in the hospital. I wish it could have remained that way always."

As time went on, the same problems recurred but there seemed a slightly better adjustment between Mr. and Mrs. L. after she had experienced this period of attention from him.

The same old problem of conflict with her husband, inability to cope with her children, and her husband's low-earning capacity continued to recur. She began to catch some faint insight into herself but never to really gain an understanding of her relationship to her father.

She never varied in her unfavorable comparison of Mr. L. to her father.

. . . . .

The above case reveals a young woman retreating always to the protected role of childhood. She submitted to others because this was more comfortable and satisfying to her than taking any responsibility on her own. Her main goal seems to be the seeking for a father-person who can be protective, generous, and benevolent. Her own father had always been this kind of person to her. Her husband had never met the standard of a father-person which she desired.

Frances L.'s techniques were passive. She followed the lines of least resistance, always expecting life about her to adjust. She complained bitterly of others and of her circumstances, seldom if ever about herself. Her techniques of adaptation were neither satisfying to herself nor were they socially acceptable, but she seemed little concerned about this. To change her techniques would have required the assuming of responsibility she tried to avoid.

Frances' sense of futility was marked because with a husband, a home, and children it was not possible to continue the role of little girl. Had her husband been more of a father and less of a partner,

her futility might have been less. On the other hand, the sense of futility could have been even greater as her submission was primarily to her own father. A conflict within her of loyalty to two fathers could have increased the problem.

Repeated attempts to reach her unchanging goals with the same old unsuccessful methods resulted in a strong sense of futility.

The areas of experience in which her futility was expressed were: A lack of *interest* in anything; too little *money*; *conflict* with her *husband*; poor *sex adjustment*; resentment over *unwanted children*; and feelings about her own *inadequacy* as to function and *personal attractiveness*.

The goals which Frances set for her life are as follows: To submit to or to follow authority of parents or parent-substitutes (4); to be dominated or controlled by others (3); to live primarily for self, gratifying her own desires (7); and to cling to security (10).

#### HISTORY 6—A CONFORMIST

Patty R. was the product of private parochial school education from kindergarten through college. She attended these schools because of her father's decision, but regretted missing the many opportunities that public school offered. Her choice of colleges was limited by her meager knowledge of available schools and by the fact that she had to remain near home.

"I knew Dad would never consent to letting me go to any school that was far removed from home. I knew I would be more apt to get away if I went some place where my parents could visit frequently."

At an early age, Patty realized that her father wanted her near him. He directed her every move. She resented this very strict discipline and close supervision, but realized that she could do nothing about it.

"I have always been under the supervision of my parents and probably always will be."

"I began to resent their domination early in life but what could I do about it?"

Patty's father used every means of keeping her dependent upon him. She was given no allowance but was forced to ask for every penny she needed, and to give a full account of her reasons. Many social opportunities were missed because her father refused her freedom. She had no dates in high school as it seemed easier to forego these than

to struggle with her father. She wanted to assert herself, but decided she really could do nothing.

Then too, Patty felt socially inadequate during adolescence and she suffered through several experiences as a wallflower. She felt her clothes were never attractive and that she had certain physical features which detracted from her looks. Because of such close parental supervision there was little opportunity to develop an easy relationship with other children. She was shy and lacked self-confidence.

"I dislike to go to parties, and feel like a bump on a log."

"One boy who was nice to me suddenly stopped walking home from school with me and I found out that Father had told him to stop. I resented that but could do nothing."

"I did not think I would ever have an opportunity to marry, and I did not want to remain unmarried."

Patty knew Mr. R. while she was in high school because he lived in the same town and attended the same church. Their relationship developed easily during that time and they went together for some time after she finished high school, and through college. Their engagement lasted two years. It seemed as though they would never be able to marry as Mr. R.'s income was so small. He was investing in his own business and there was no hope of assistance as Patty's family opposed the match.

"I was not too happy during our engagement. R. was not attentive and seemed quite indifferent to me. This worried me, but he was the only boy I knew well enough to marry."

"Whenever I have really wanted anything badly enough to make the effort, I have fussed and fumed until I got what I wanted."

The first serious conflict Patty ever had with her father was over her marriage with Mr. R. Family opposition was intense. Her father considered him a "nice young boy," but with neither enough maturity nor enough financial prospects to make him a good husband. Mr. R. was a local boy whose family was not socially or economically equal to Patty's.

After graduating from college, Patty found life dull. As Mr. R. was not ready to marry, she decided to get a job. This also brought parental opposition, but her father finally consented to her working in his office. The mother wanted Patty to prepare in college for some kind of vocation, but the father was determined she should remain at home with him as there was no need for her to work.

Patty's vocational experience did not last long nor was it especially satisfying. She was given very little chance to do anything.

"No one in the office ever made any effort to show me what to do. I just stood around like a bump on a log."

Even though she finally gained her father's consent to marry, much

conflict centered about the completion of her plans. Such matters as guests for the wedding, the honeymoon, and living arrangements afterwards caused difficulty. Throughout it all, Patty seemed to feel that she was going back on her father. This intense conflict at the time helped dull these feelings which came back later and have continued.

"Since I have married, I feel I should make it up to Daddy in some way. He always wanted me to stay at home with him."

"I feel bad whenever I hurt my father," Patty would often say.

"After you have lived with your husband, you appreciate your parents more."

To begin with, Mr. R. was Mrs. R.'s means of gaining independence and the social status of marriage. She was fond of him, but he did not measure up in a number of ways which she desired. Often her tone of voice indicated a somewhat patronizing attitude toward him and his accomplishments.

"R. is nicer now than when I married him even though he is still quite prosaic. He is never thoughtful, but we get along all right."

The R.'s seemed to have developed a fairly good play relationship, although several things he enjoyed he did not care to have her share. They lived next to Mrs. R.'s family as her father gave them the house. They also ate most of their meals with the older couple. Although Mrs. R. often expressed need for freedom from her father, she leaned on him.

Patty said her father made her nervous when he got nervous. They no longer had anything in common, but she still did as he told her since he continued to buy her everything she needed.

"I am glad R. is beginning to appreciate all Daddy has done for us. I believe he sees now that it would never be a good idea for us to move away from here."

The R.'s sex adjustment was difficult for them both. Patty's early sex education was negative, and nothing in her later years gave her any very satisfactory knowledge.

"I can remember as a child having certain thoughts. I knew it was a sin to have such impure thoughts, and this worried me terribly."

"When we first married, we realized our complete lack of preparedness for sexual adjustment. Finally R. consulted a doctor. Since then, we have gotten along fairly well."

Within the first year of marriage Patty became pregnant. She spent much time in reading and preparing, in order to do a good job as a mother. Although her general health was good, she had some difficulty because of poor nutrition. Her eating habits were only fair, and as a result she had health complications. This attitude carried over after the baby arrived. It was some time before Mrs. R. realized the connection between health and good food habits.

Patty's three pregnancies came close together, but she accepted them without protest. She and her husband wanted as many children as they could afford. Both were in agreement on this point. Her mother was disturbed over the frequency of Patty's pregnancies and hinted that something should be done.

Patty's father found great satisfaction in her children, doing for them in the same fashion as he had done for her. However, she resented his method of giving, although not the fact that he gave.

"He does things in such a way that you don't want to thank him for them."

"He does everything for the children but wants his own way with them. He is unguarded [emotionally] around them and blows off."

The conflict between letting her father do many material things for her and resentment of his dominating manner was ever present.

Patty was a good Catholic. Occasionally during her interviews, she referred to the over-control of her father as being linked with the control of the Church. In telling of her college adjustments, she made the following statements:

"I did not rebel at the strict discipline at school as I had always had this at home. The discipline was about the same, the only difference being in having someone else inflict it."

"It was a relief to attend finally a day school for specialized work where I no longer had the old strict supervision."

"I was afraid I might drift into becoming a nun."

After Mrs. R. discontinued her contacts with the Center, she had other children. She and her family still lived next door to her parents. Her father was continuing to buy her the things she wanted, needed, and could not have otherwise. She resented her father, but felt she should make it up to him because of all he did for her. Marriage gave her a feeling of release, but since she thought Mr. R. would never have a large income, it did not give her the complete security she needed for independence.

. . . . .

This case illustrates marked ambivalence in goals and resulting conflict in the achievement of these goals. Because of this, never at any time could Patty R. satisfy all her goals because they were conflicting. Hence, futility seemed inevitable for her.

From early childhood, Patty conformed to her father's domination. This seemed the only thing to do and it generally brought her satisfaction in material gains as well as parental approval. She also conformed to the Church. These two dominating forces in her

life were synonymous in her thinking. Her father's domination showed no lessening throughout her entire life. At the same time, Patty felt quite early in life a need to be independent. She made efforts in this direction, but most of them were defeated. A few times in her life when certain social goals, such as college and marital status, were imminent, she directed her efforts toward the accomplishment of these which violated the goal of parental conformity. After such deviations, Patty always felt remorseful and attempted to make it up to herself by conforming more than before. Economic security was a goal held by Patty and one which her father represented. Had her husband offered an equal amount of security, Patty might have been thrown into greater conflict, or might have had the necessary backing to achieve her other goal of independence. Social status was also important to her, but quite subordinate to the first two goals as revealed by her behavior.

The techniques used by Patty were conforming rather than positive and aggressive, except in the few instances mentioned. She conformed, she drifted along, she accepted all symbols of comfort, and only occasionally took an active part in gaining other things she wanted. Resentment of her father seemed to be her negative way of adapting to lack of independence.

The areas of experience in which Patty expressed futility centered about money and material security, her own lack of attractiveness, and the conflict between *submission and resistance to her parents*. Patty could not achieve her opposing goals. She would not modify them. Hence, she showed futility when repeating failures in either.

Patty's goals can be classified as follows: To submit to or follow authority of parents or parent-substitutes (4); to cling to security (10); to resist or break from control of others (5); and to be socially prominent or important (18).

#### COMPARISON OF HISTORIES

It is believed that the histories presented in this chapter illustrate the ways in which individuals, in structuring their own life patterns, appear to develop the goals toward which they drive and the techniques for achieving these goals or making adaptations when



frustrated. The histories also should indicate that the verbalized feeling of futility is an expression of total personality. Even though similar words are used in many of the histories, each woman expressed her feelings of futility in the context of and consistent with her own personality pattern.

These cases also can be interpreted according to certain current psychological theories. Alicia, Mildred, Frances, and Patty in their respective unresolved attachments to their fathers are representative of those cases which bear out the classical *Electra patterns*.<sup>(19)(31)</sup>

In the application of Freud's Oedipus complex we see Alicia unable to fill her beloved father's place with even the most adoring of husbands—hence her continued feeling of futility over a relationship which she seemed unable to substitute for the original one. Patty's tie to her father was identified with her economic needs, which enabled her to rationalize continued dependence on her father.

Frances made little if any attempt to resolve her Electra role. She rejected her husband in nearly every aspect of their marriage and continued the attachment to her father in both an emotional and an economic dependence, the latter being unnecessary in the actual situation. On the other hand, Mildred, although finding deep satisfaction in the relationship with her father, managed to resolve this attachment gradually on a more mature level. The intense frustration in Frances resulted in marked futility. Mildred's frustration produced only a mild degree of futility.

In the case of Barbara, her self-interest, self-love, and inability to find a love object beyond herself reveals a *narcissistic pattern* or egocentrism, according to Freud.<sup>(19)(31)</sup> Zilboorg would see her as in love with herself.<sup>(13)</sup> Horney would interpret Barbara's narcissism as a clinging to an image of self that is not there—that no longer exists.<sup>(34)</sup>

Following Freud's pleasure-pain theory, we see that an accumulation of *psychic pain* produces a state of helplessness in an individual. Alicia's case represents this aspect of the pleasure-pain theory.<sup>(31)</sup>

According to Jung's theory of personality, Alicia and Emily each wear a mask—build a facade which prevents them from having to face the realities of their lives and from having to accept these

realities. Alicia's "ghostly lover" represents to her the desired object or state of being in contrast to the real relationships in her life to which she has not adapted. Emily is afraid to see herself and her husband as they really are, for when she does the discrepancy between her wishful fantasy and reality produces a sense of futility.<sup>127</sup>

By Adler's interpretation, Alicia's intense feeling of superiority, which was established in early childhood and spread into many areas of her life, had to be maintained at all costs. Any violation of her superior position produced intense feelings of inferiority.<sup>11</sup>

Such interpretations as these and many others do not in any way nullify the findings of the present study but rather strengthen them.

According to the theory of this study, the degree of futility varies from history to history, as indicated by the intensity and repetition of the women's statements, by the recurrence or persistence of the situations in which futility was experienced, and by the importance of the frustrated goal or the affected area. Alicia expressed marked futility because her major goals in life could not be achieved. Her situation was one of persistent frustration, which was put into words repeatedly and with great intensity of feeling. For example, "I do not believe I can go on living as I now live." On the other hand, Mildred S. revealed a slight degree of futility. Her statements were mild and they occurred infrequently throughout the period of history-giving. Most of her basic drives seemed to be satisfied, but because it was impossible to be the completely important person she desired and to remain inviolate to the degree that she wished, a sense of futility developed.

Barbara F.'s sense of futility was expressed to a marked degree. Her statements were intense and were repeated many times. She seemed completely unable to achieve her basic goal of security, and this failure persisted over many years. In contrast to Barbara is Patty R.'s life, which expressed futility but moderately. Patty's statements recurred frequently but never with any great intensity. The ambivalence in goals made it possible for her to satisfy one while she was being frustrated in the other, thus giving her a chance to have a measure of satisfaction at the same time she found herself frustrated. Therefore, the degree of futility was neither as

great nor as mild as it might have been had she retained one major goal which could be satisfied or frustrated.

Emily H. used a technique of dramatization in her effort to satisfy basic goals. This method was socially acceptable and apparently quite satisfactory to her. On the other hand, Alicia B. played a role in her own personal drama that was socially acceptable but which was personally unsatisfying. Since this technique did not actually help her achieve the goal in view, great futility was experienced.

Patty R. grumbled over submitting to the authority of her father, but for the most part conformed because by this means she gained what she wanted. Frances L. complained because it was not possible for her to submit to the satisfying control and authority of her favorite parent. Married life, which might have offered her independence, instead threatened that which she most wanted—the complete protection of her father.

Barbara F. withdrew from practically every situation that required positive action. Her personality structure seemed to find this method consistent to itself. On the other hand, Mildred S. used the technique of active, aggressive attack, even though it was clothed in smooth and diplomatic dress. This method was expressive of Mildred's total personality structure. It would have been impossible for Barbara to use Mildred's technique and improbable for Mildred to resort to Barbara's. It is just as absurd to think that Alicia's sense of futility might have been relieved by developing the dramatizing technique so satisfying to Emily H. Each woman, throughout the span of her entire life, had been slowly and gradually evolving a way of life that was her own. Everything she did was consistent within the total structure.

Each of the women needed to gain insight into her basic motivation and how she used this, if she were to have help in her feelings of futility. She also needed understanding of her frustrations and means of adapting to them. Any change of techniques or methods the woman herself would select from all the suggestions which were actually in keeping with her newly revised objectives and consistent with her old pattern of life.

We can see in these life histories that different goals, important to each of the women in childhood, were outgrowths of their

physical selves subjected to different environmental conditions and pressures. As a result of their respective goals, certain techniques of adaptation seemed to evolve because of their effectiveness in early frustrating situations. The established habit-pattern became so strong that it blurred evaluation and modification of techniques and goals alike.

Perhaps nothing is more important in the use of life history material than the conclusive evidence that people are consistent within their individual field or life structure. Each of the case histories presented in this chapter, as well as all of the other forty-four used, has a totality, or configuration, of its own. Everything within the history, even expressions of futility, is consistent with the individual's own pattern of life.

## CHAPTER X

### *Conclusions: Why Is Futility Felt?*

To state the major conclusions of the study is in effect to restate the original hypothesis in the following way: *An individual experiences a sense of futility when, after repeated frustration in achieving his important life goals, he remains unable to modify these goals and unable to adapt his techniques used for attaining the goals.* Additional inferences have emerged from the investigation, which are subordinate and supporting to the main conclusion.

The histories of the fifty college women bore out the original hypothesis as it was presented in Chapter II. The women whose life goal or goals remained fixed and inflexible regardless of their efforts to achieve them and who at the same time clung tenaciously to their usual methods of achieving these goals even in the face of continued failure felt futile.

Evidence in these life histories brought out clearly that *each woman established her major life goals early in childhood and at the same time found for herself ways and means of satisfying these goals.* Both ends and methods tended to persist throughout life if during childhood they had been firmly entrenched. *Unless the woman was given assistance early in life in how to evaluate or modify her goals and in how to find varied and more workable techniques, the longer she remained successful with her old ways, the more strongly set her pattern became.*

On reaching adulthood, if the woman was continuing to strive for the same early goals, using approximately the same techniques with little if any success, futility was inevitable.

Goals seemed to be unmodifiable because the meanings which became attached to them early were consistently reinforced for the woman early in life. Each time her goals were achieved, establishment of the life pattern became more assured. If circumstances

expressing futility the problem represented an impasse. Each woman had many problems to meet in life. For these she needed the best possible equipment: insight into herself and techniques for a less rigid, constricted way of life.

*Every woman was making an active attack on life, except in the areas where her failure was great.* Even when expressing futility she tried from time to time, but with decreasing determination, to effect a change. This active outlook on life, when coupled with adequate facilities for making the many adaptations demanded of individuals today, should not make for futile, frustrated lives.

Failure did not always result in futility, but failure to achieve something toward which the woman had struggled all her life because of its tremendous value to her did bring a sense of futility until she could find new ways of achieving her goals or of modifying them. Sometimes circumstances shifted so that the cause for feeling futile was removed. Some women modified their goals as they became more mature and had more insight into themselves. Other women found more effective and acceptable means of achieving their desired ends. *It was seen in these cases that a sense of futility did give way when a clear or new path opened for the woman and removed wholly or in part the cause of failure.* Most women could not wait for "something" to happen.

This investigation emphasizes anew the great variety of experiences to which all individuals are exposed and the need they have for developing flexible life patterns and self-insight which will enable them to make satisfactory adjustments to the myriad situations they will inevitably encounter.

In spite of the many expressions of futility revealed in these fifty life histories, the women cannot be judged by objective standards to be ineffectual. They were attractive, interesting persons who were socially and intellectually above average. When reading their histories as a whole it was easy to see in them a genuine zest for living. In few instances, and then only periodically, were the lives of these women pictures of unrelieved gloom. They had experienced problems in many areas of life but on the whole they were living adequately.

The concern of this study is that such women as these should feel ineffectual and hopeless in so many of their problem situations. To

carry as much of a burden of futility as some of them did seems a great waste and loss of human energy. *Had the women possessed tools and understanding to meet their life problems, they need never have experienced futility to any marked degree* since they repeatedly showed sufficient desire to tackle and overcome certain of the difficulties which they continually encountered in achieving life goals.

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## CHAPTER XI

### *Implications of the Study: What Might Be Done?*

Frustrations are inevitable. Ways of making adjustments to them are a part of each individual's personality pattern and may be satisfying or unsatisfying. Poor adjustment brings waste in human happiness and energy which can be offset only by the continuous effort to understand and apply those factors that contribute to sound personal-social living. When the process of human adjustment is actually the central focus for education, then education must concern itself with the formation of personality structure.

The findings of this study should serve to implement further the approach to education which takes as its basic premise satisfactory adjustment of the individual within his own social setting. Since the fifty life histories of college women were selected from a much larger population and from one which had the privileges of education and background, these implications should be applicable to a more extensive group.

In considering the early establishment of personality structure, *the powerful influence of parental training, whether conscious or unconscious in shaping this early pattern, was evident in each history.* The tremendous importance of parents cannot be overlooked, since parental demands and expectations are such persistent and powerful factors in the development of the young child's personality structure. From the very beginning and within his environment the child assigns meanings to life experiences, sets up goals, and finds ways of achieving these goals. When frustrated he learns a way of behavior characteristically his own. He may behave aggressively, act constructively, cooperate easily as well as react with hostility, become satisfied, or experience a sense of futility in his

daily living. Parents need help to understand their children and themselves so that they can love, protect, and approve of these children as well as give them an increasing variety of experience; to recognize and have appreciation of each child's unique personality structure; to give to their children more and more insight into themselves and their ego ideals; to help them find and use satisfying and constructive ways of adapting themselves to life's innumerable demands; and to assist them in attaining an ever-increasing level of maturity. Above all, parents must provide a rich emotional background for their children in which the climate of feeling is warm and affectionate.

Parents of young children, unless too crystallized in a rigid pattern, are ready to make adaptations and to learn much about their offspring. They can make use of the help that is available to them because of the added motivation which comes with having children. In order to help the child we must aid the adult who is responsible for him. Yet this adult, as we have seen demonstrated in these women, is set in a life-long pattern. It becomes difficult to help any adult because of this established pattern, especially if it is an inflexible one; but nevertheless the most intelligent help possible should be offered him.

Young people in high school and college will be the parents of the oncoming generation. Is theirs an environment of family life in which a sense of affectionate security pervades? Are they seeing psychology applied to meet their own personal needs? Is this accompanied by practical personal counseling? Are they seeing fulfillment through marriage and family life? Are they training for the complicated job of parenthood as they might for other vocations? Are they viewing some of the tremendous social problems and changes in the world today which must affect their way of life?

At an early age many influences are affecting the young child's personality development. Nursery schools and grade schools can, if they would, help lay the foundation for effective education in personal living. Nursery schools, when good, provide a warm feeling of acceptance and emotional satisfaction for the children, but for many of them much is yet to be desired. More and better schools to meet children's needs are necessary. Grade schools, when

needs the most practical and professional education possible. Unfortunately it has been sentimentalized, eulogized, belittled, and ignored. Better and more adequate understanding should be prerequisite to assuming the responsibility of children. To permit "uneducated" parents to make a life of blunders is tragic.

*Education for the overwhelming job of parenthood must have academic status, as is true of any profession.* Universities, colleges, and high schools should face the fact that they are educating more potential parents than any other one kind of professional trainee. This type of education should be definite and direct and not left to chance alone.

#### NEED TO EDUCATE FOR RELATIONSHIPS

The bases for much of the futility which was experienced by the women in this study were found in the areas of their relationships. These were relationships with parents, husbands, children, in-laws, friends, servants, vocational associates, and casual acquaintances.

*The relationships of parents with children are so deep-rooted and far-reaching in the life of any individual that they can never be replaced or completely nullified.* It should be possible, however, for parents and children to gain far more understanding of themselves in relation to each other, of the dynamics of their relationships, and of the common properties as well as uniqueness of these relationships, than they now have. Attitudes of sentimentality toward parents, or inviolateness, will not equip the oncoming generation to meet its problems. An atmosphere of love and affection will offer a climate of emotion so essential to development. Relationships of parents with children should provide the life-giving qualities necessary to an individual's development rather than produce negative qualities which are destructive and crippling. A sense of futility, a feeling of hopelessness is hardly the reaction to be desired in so continuous and basic a relationship as that of parent and child. The child's well-established pattern of adaptation to adult authority seems to persist into his later life and to continue with little modification. Education could undertake no more important task than to assist children and parents in gaining mutual love and affection as well as insight into their relationships.

*Sibling relationships, although usually not as important as those of parent-children, also affect the basic structure of the personality.* Often the reactions of competition and jealousy originate with sisters and brothers. Since early relationships with friends are patterned on those of the home, on those with parents and with siblings, the continued and persistent effect of these practiced relationships may easily affect the individual's life-long pattern of interaction with other people.

*Much of human adult happiness depends upon the rightness of husband-wife relationships.* If one's relationships with the marriage partner produce frustrations which are so unresolved and persistent as to result in feelings of futility, the goal of happiness can never be achieved. The pattern of relationships which is set in childhood is more than likely to determine the husband-wife adjustment as well as all other adult relations.

Difficulty with in-laws provides another aspect of relationships where the individual meets frustration. Unless the problem is largely an economic one, it seems to resolve itself into a matter of child-parent adjustments which are accompanied by feelings of futility.

Even though each new generation assumes contemporary aspects, the basic pattern of relationships is apt to remain. Only penetrating analysis and interpretation of behavior at early ages, together with a rich emotional climate, can help to bring any appreciable change in these patterns. If the individual's personality structure is capable of adapting to others in socially desirable ways, his way of life is not apt to fail. Any childhood pattern of relationships which persists and does not succeed in adult life may result in a sense of futility unless additional means of adaptation are found.

*Every child needs opportunity to experience good affectional relationships, to find ways of understanding himself, his own motives, and his relationships with other people.* Children must learn chiefly through experiencing those things we believe of extreme importance for them in their relationships. Schools are in a position to do far more than they now do. Throughout grade school and high school, children can learn in their daily experiences to play with members of both sexes, to like them, to be friendly, to work with them, and to cooperate with them. Instead, they too often

practice competing with, getting ahead of, and dominating others. Characteristic ways of reacting to other people and deep-seated attitudes concerning them, which develop in these early situations, will carry over and affect adult relationships, both personal and professional.

#### NEED TO UNDERSTAND SELF

To hear college-educated women express futility about themselves seems difficult to understand when education proposes to prepare for life and for meeting life's problems.

A large number of the women in this study expressed a sense of futility in their attitudes toward themselves and their characteristics, about their reactions of dominance, and their reactions of submission. If intelligent and educationally privileged women are repeatedly unable to solve the problems with themselves and with their relationships, then education has not yet helped us determine and use what is most needed for human adjustment. Psychology courses, which might serve the individual usefully, often fail to consider the student who is being taught, hence add little to her self-understanding. Psychoanalysis cannot be offered to the high school or young college student, but certain techniques and principles can be practically applied. Education, to be effective, must help the individual satisfy her own needs constructively and gain insight into herself, her attitudes, her goals and aspirations, as well as her own behavior.

#### NEED OF EDUCATION FOR MARRIAGE

The importance of marriage and the appalling proportion of failure in it, either in divorce or unhappy homes, should be a tremendous and immediate challenge to education. Successful, happy marriage is an important cultural expectation. The greatest number of women of this study placed successful marriage at the top of their personal goals. Ranking high was the goal to be successful parents. They also expressed the desire to be secure.

*Preparation is considered essential for success in a career, yet only a limited number of educators have seen the need for preparation*

*for marriage.* Marriage provides the framework within which the most vital ultimate adult relationships are formed, and where the personality structures for the next generation are developed. Fortunately, motivation, one of the essentials of education, is not lacking among young people who consistently avail themselves of the few opportunities that are open for preparation in marriage. Probably such motivation lies in the desire to gain knowledge in these areas of living which demand new skills and which offer different experiences to the individual. Seldom does one realize the importance of understanding his own goals and aspirations, his attitudes, and his pattern of relationships with others in preparation for establishing his marriage. Education can surely provide the knowledge and information desired by young people themselves and at the same time make possible more understanding and satisfaction of their own needs and motives. Within marriage the individual must find the warmth of affection and of security necessary for her; hence preparation for marriage must help her understand this.

Education for marriage that is practical and realistic should be the responsibility of high schools, colleges, and other institutions whose purposes are to equip young people for life. Churches have an excellent opportunity for giving premarital education, as so many marriages occur in the church; civic programs of adult education, state services, welfare organizations, such as the Y.W.C.A. and Y.M.C.A., have similar opportunities and a similar challenge to face.

#### NEED FOR SEX EDUCATION

*Sex education must not diminish but rather should become more practical and widespread.* The findings of this study, which revealed that 80 percent of the group of college-educated women expressed feelings of futility over their sex lives, emphasize this need. Sex education today should be far more than information alone. In addition to providing sound biological knowledge and presenting techniques for satisfactory adjustment, sex education must be understood as an integral part of the individual's adjustment. The emotional climate of early life lays the foundation, and in no

small part, of this adjustment. The sex life of a person is a part of his personality structure, and is affected by his background of experience, the kind of life he lives, his attitudes, understanding of his needs, and the amount of accurate information he has on the subject when needed. The need for intelligent, widespread sex education is borne out in the findings of this investigation as well as in similar studies. The family cannot sidestep its important responsibility here.

#### NEED FOR HEALTH EDUCATION

Problems of health for these women seemed to grow out of their unawareness and disregard of their own health needs. Since practicing good health measures is so tied up with other aspects of personality structure, it would seem that health education must examine its methods in the light of the results, if it is actually to provide the rudiments of good health to an effective degree.

#### NEED FOR EDUCATION IN SKILLS OF HOMEMAKING

Everyone needs the tools of his trade if he is to do the job well. The woman who chooses homemaking as her profession should be prepared to do this skillfully if she is to gain satisfaction in it. She will have to manage money, time, and activities, but we blithely continue to omit this training from her education. Her groan over housekeeping—"I feel so hopeless. Why did my education not help me more?"—must be taken seriously if we are to help her. Good home management is made possible by an accumulation of effective skills and is interfered with when these are lacking. The comfort and well-being of the family members, a good standard of nutrition, the practice of sound principles of hygiene are the responsibilities that fall on every home. Knowledge and practice in these are essential, even though they may be supplied in part by other agencies or servants, if the woman is not to meet repeated frustration and to experience a sense of futility in her efforts.

Wise home management grows out of training and experience rather than desire and intuition. Women spend most of the money that goes for consumer goods, yet few have had training in this.

Women must in a sense be efficiency experts in the home if they would manage the demands made of them in the time provided. It is of little wonder that the woman who cannot juggle cooking, washing, child care, social activities, and interruptions to make some leisure for herself looks back from her frustrations with a feeling of nostalgia to the routine of an eight-hour office day, the well-defined hours of classroom teaching, or the ordered existence of her college years.

Education has a responsibility to supply training for homemaking as a part of every woman's general education, if adequate preparation is to be offered her. Status for this type of training must be recognized if it would actually meet the needs of the oncoming generation. Reference is not made here to professionalized home economics but to a general program in this aspect of education which would help women prepare for their own home and family life. Those women who wish to make homemaking their sole profession must feel status and dignity in this choice in college as well as out; they must find satisfaction in the job. Perhaps recent emphasis on the joy of cooking and the delights of family-prepared food may be one significant and hopeful trend for the new generation of homemakers.

#### NEED FOR VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

Many women choose vocations other than homemaking. Vocational guidance has long been recognized as essential to future satisfaction in work. Frequently women carry homemaking and a career simultaneously. To prepare for one requires effort; to plan for both needs even more thoughtful and careful choice. If women marry, the choice inevitably comes between giving up a chosen vocation or continuing it along with marriage. When the type of work which a woman has followed is not feasible after marriage, a sense of futility often results when she must give it up. Temporary relinquishing of work outside the home while children are little might in some instances prevent a sense of futility from arising when permanently leaving a profession creates a problem. Women who are unhappy in their relationships at home often project this into a sense of frustration over the vocation they have relinquished.



As these basic personal relationships improve, feelings of futility seem to lessen.

Many women today maintain both job and home satisfactorily, and should be able to do so if they desire. But it takes awareness on the part of the individual of the responsibility which she has for the relationships within the home, herself, management of the home, and demands of the job. The woman who carries both home and outside vocation can experience futility as readily if she fails in measuring up to her standards for these as if she gave up her job unwillingly. The husband's understanding of and sharing in her problem seems to be an important factor.

*In vocational relationships the individual reflects his own basic personality pattern as in other areas.* Job relations are often the determinants of success. When a teacher or social worker of high intelligence and adequate training fails in doing a satisfactory piece of work because of continued difficulty in work relationships, she has failed to obtain from her background that which makes life satisfactory to live. To express futility over failure in work because of relationships indicates a personality structure unable to make the adjustments which are necessary for successful personal relationships.

Vocational guidance for women would do well to include in its educational program recognition of the extreme importance of relationships both on the job and at home. Pointing out all responsibilities involved in certain vocations and helping to select those which parallel or are not incompatible with homemaking might alleviate much frustration in later years.

#### NEED FOR COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY

The educated woman has much to contribute both in the home and out in the community. She has the right to participate and the responsibility to serve, but she ought not to be shackled by conflict between home and community needs. A number of women in the study expressed feelings of futility over doing nothing important in the community while being "only a wife and mother at home." A balance between home and community service is something the educated woman must learn to maintain. If education increases the

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status of community participation and belittles the role of home-making, then education helps to increase frustration rather than to alleviate it.

Education might surely help women see how to use their resources in living as community participants. It can stimulate and awaken an awareness of civic responsibility, but not at the expense of the home and family.

#### NEED FOR BROADENED INTERESTS

To find college-educated women expressing a sense of futility over having few interests to pursue and over experiencing monotony in their lives seems incredible. Is not one of the stated purposes of education to create and extend the interests of the individual? Has their education been so uninspiring and static that it failed to help these women develop resources for themselves, or has it failed to help them locate the spring to self-motivation? Perhaps failure to use imagination grows out of the childhood pattern which eliminates imaginative interest at an early age in an effort to make the individual conform to adult demands.

#### NEED FOR SOCIAL SKILLS

In our culture a woman is expected to be attractive, well dressed, socially skilled, and perennially young. The high schools and colleges which include courses in etiquette, offer personality analyses, and set up clinics for good grooming are already providing an aspect of education that meets some important needs for women. The way in which beauty parlors, weight-reducing salons, and cosmetic firms thrive testifies to this. Numerous books on etiquette are published, and *Emily Post* remains an authority! Social skills are a part of total personality structure. Many women realize their own possibilities; many do not. Many are unable to meet their own standard of attractiveness, or that laid down for them by the social group of which they are a part. Help can and should be offered through education for such important cultural expectations, and at an age early enough to be helpful in the woman's social adaptation.

#### NEED FOR RELIGIOUS BELIEF

Religion did not seem to play a vital role in the lives of these women, from evidence in the study. Few knew what they actually believed, and they expressed a none-too-ardent desire to believe something. For those who expressed futility over it, religion appeared to lack vitality. Many expressed the belief that because of education they had given up the church, but had found no religion to replace it. The women who had firm beliefs did not express futility, and neither did the few who professed atheism. Perhaps the results of similar studies on religion would differ decidedly from region to region, within communities, and according to times. These women were of the postwar generation of the 1920's and early 30's. They were more representative of the culture of one geographical region. Nearly all expressed a general desire to understand the Bible, but they also expressed only mild concern over their lack of knowledge; nor did they do anything about changing.

From this study might be drawn implications for religious education of a kind that is vital and practical to the individual in trying to understand himself and the ways of evolving his own personal belief.

#### NEED FOR PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

Strangely enough, although the women articulated their desires and goals over and over again, few seemed to have a consciously worked out and well-constructed philosophy of life. Oftentimes they denied having any philosophy and expressed a need for one in spite of having articulated many times the ends toward which they were striving. Many of their apparent goals were never mentioned. In fact, they often denied those which were apparent from their behavior.

Education must use every means available to help the individual recognize the philosophy he holds and the goals toward which he struggles. How can frustration be understood and coped with, how can behavior be modified unless the individual has a real knowledge of the end toward which he is struggling?

To qualify as an educated person and be prepared for a vocation are major aims of college education. *To gain insight into self and to learn better ways of applying knowledge toward an improved way of life is true education.*

What is the value of history, language, science, mathematics, psychology, sociology, and economics if not to help people live more meaningful lives? What is gained from English if the individual does not derive valuable interpretations for his own life? Too often education fails to give interpretations which are meaningful enough to the individual to assist him in his own struggles. This study brought out forcibly that, equipped as they were, this group of college-educated women many times lacked the means within themselves to adapt to the frustrations and problems of their lives.

The implications of these findings add further evidence that people need help in making their adjustments to life, that the personality operates as a whole, and that all experience of the individual is interrelated. People need not only temporary and immediate help but that which comes early enough and remains continuously enough to make possible the development of a sound healthy personality structure. To have this, one must find in his early family life the rich warmth of affection and security so basic to good development. Such an individual structure can make a dynamic satisfying adjustment to the demands which life brings. When adjustment is threatened, then help is needed. If it would be truly effective, education must be accompanied by counseling at every age level. Education consists not of group learning alone; it needs to employ the means for working individually as well and for helping families provide the basic human satisfactions.

Education, as always, faces a tremendous challenge. Its processes are slow, its machinery laborious, and its interpretations are quixotic. Yet it is the one means we have by which individuals may be helped to build a better life for themselves and for future generations. Educators who view only the material to be taught rather than the persons themselves with their needs, aspirations, and goals, who refuse to encompass those tools of knowledge which can realistically and practically benefit the individual, who fail to adapt continually their methods and knowledge in keeping with the most recent findings in research, retard the progress we need desperately to make

in improvement of daily living. Going back to old ways, shutting out new, vital knowledge, failing to accept basic human needs, and rejecting all but the academically orthodox cannot possibly help mankind meet the problems of his contemporary world or find a personally satisfying way of life.

Every agency for social improvement and every profession concerned with human progress should be strengthening education, both formal and informal, in adult and parent education programs, in institutions of higher education, in secondary and elementary schools, and in kindergarten-nursery schools. Such concern must bring a *practical and concerted effort toward providing realistic, vital, and effective social education.*

We do not need more and more organizations impinging upon the individual. Such developments could only increase futility. We need the revision and modification of our major institutions in order to help people meet the terrific forces already confusing them today, so that a sense of futility will not be too often one of the inevitable results. If one's aspirations are always achieved and his efforts always successful, the danger of becoming smug, shallow, and complacent is great. But is it not possible to look ahead so that the next generation of people may be spared unnecessarily shackling, inhibited feelings, such as those of futility? What kind of education does the individual need to make him more satisfactory to himself and help him function more effectively within his social setting?

A study limited to fifty women can do no more than provide certain implications and open up the possibilities of further investigation of such a problem as that of futility. Additional research should involve a more extensive population, and one more inclusive as to sex, age, vocation, socio-economic status, and geographic location. The subjective and qualitative treatment necessary for life histories needs great variation in approach and broad interpretation.

## *Appendixes*

*College Women Who Express Futility*

p.93. "She cried, and then said, 'It seems so hopeless. I want to do something that justifies living.'"

p.100. "I'm playing an intolerable part of 'play-acting.'"

p.102. "I cannot see leaving the secure for the insecurity of divorce. I am just a coward."

p.109. "I have reached the point of just wondering if anything is worth carrying through." (husband's illness; sex life.)

p.109. "I cannot do what was advised. The more I attempt sexual intercourse, the more repulsive this becomes."

p.109. "I question in my own mind if my husband's trouble can be relieved by this treatment."

p.113. "I am extremely discouraged about myself, and feel that my plans have gone completely awry."

p.114. "I am discouraged over my illness. I am facing a situation that makes me angry and one with which I am almost unable to cope."

p.114. "I reach the place so many times where it doesn't seem life is worth living."

p.115. "I don't believe I can go on living as I now live."

p.113b. [Excerpt from letter.] "In short, it seems as if everything I have done for the last eighteen years has been more or less futile and what is worse—so far as my husband is concerned—wrong."

p.114. [Letter.] "Like a squirrel in a cage, my mind has gone around trying to find some way in which I could return and continue my responsibility."

p.134. "The way I feel now, I don't ever want to take a job. I am so weary. . . . I want to go away and see if I can get a little fun out of life. I am not as young as I once was and I don't want to be cheated out of some fun."

**LIFE GOALS (MAJOR)**

- (11) To plan a constructive way of life; to have a conscious philosophy and try to follow this.
- (13) To conform to social opinion and expectations.
- (14) To contribute something worth while to society.
- (3) To be dominated or controlled by others.
- (16) To achieve success as a wife.

**FRUSTRATED LIFE GOALS (FRUSTRATED IN ALL MAJOR GOALS)**

- (11) (13) (14) (3) (16)



## AREAS OF EXPERIENCE WHERE FUTILITY IS EXPRESSED

Extreme Futility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Attitudes toward self</li> <li>2. Aggressiveness</li> <li>5. Health</li> <li>6. Sex</li> <li>15. Recognition or appreciation by husband</li> <li>19. Community participation</li> <li>25. Crises</li> </ul>
Moderate Futility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Submissiveness</li> <li>16. Child care and training</li> <li>20. Vocation</li> <li>22. Finances</li> <li>23. Unwanted children</li> </ul>
Mild Futility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Social prestige or status</li> <li>14. Husband-wife relationships</li> <li>21. Housekeeping</li> </ul>
No Evidence of Futility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Attractiveness</li> <li>8. Social skills</li> <li>9. Interests</li> <li>10. Education</li> <li>11. Religion</li> <li>12. Parent relationships</li> <li>13. Sibling relationships</li> <li>17. In-law relationships</li> <li>18. Friends</li> <li>24. Sterility</li> </ul>
Futility Expressed over Life in General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26. Statements made of futility</li> </ul>

## FACTORS RELATED TO FRUSTRATED GOALS

Early pattern of model child doing exactly what parents desire, leading a beautiful life.

Parents' happy home life; themselves models in the community, proving pattern to be emulated.

Discrepancy between first two and present life.

Not married to "right" man. Does not love husband.

Desire to succeed in marriage. Need to escape her intolerable marriage.

Idealistic and unrealistic attitude toward sex adjustment.

Health poor.

Married life prevents her contribution to the world.

Husband's poor health.

## TECHNIQUES FOR ADJUSTMENTS TO FRUSTRATION

- Struggle to maintain ideal—perfectionist standards at all costs.
- Uses socially desirable and family acceptable means of adjusting.
- Plays a part or acts the role she wishes to maintain for her friends.

## 2. HERSELF INVIOULATE

## EXPRESSIONS OF FUTILITY

- p.32. "Try as hard as I can, I feel I will never really know my older brother."
- p.43. "I dread and fear death because there is nothing after it."
- p.45. "I now realize there can be no complete and total understanding between people, even in marriage."
- p.58. "My marriage is too static and not challenging enough. Maybe if I had children or a job outside the home, I would not feel this way."
- p.58. "Housework, to the exclusion of everything else, isn't important enough for a woman to devote her entire life to."
- p.61. "I would give anything to go back into work but my husband will never be willing for me to do this."
- p.63. "I long to have a home of my own but I don't believe we will ever have it."
- p.70. "F. . . . was dying, and I could do so little to help him."

## LIFE GOALS (MAJOR)

- (6) To remain herself—an individual inviolate.
- (8) To seek admiration and adulation.
- (11) To plan a constructive way of life.
- (16) To achieve success as a wife.
- (15) To experience parenthood.
- (19) To aspire to professional success.

## FRUSTRATED LIFE GOALS

- (6) (8) (15) (19)

## AREAS OF EXPERIENCE WHERE FUTILITY IS EXPRESSED

Extreme Futility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Vocation</li> <li>11. Housekeeping</li> <li>15. Crises</li> </ul>
Moderate Futility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Parent-relationships</li> <li>24. Sterility</li> </ul>
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Futility Expressed over Life in General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16. Statements made of futility</li> </ul>

## FACTORS RELATED TO FRUSTRATED GOALS

Marriage prevents her being herself completely and satisfying her own desires which she has been and done since childhood.

Discrepancy between childhood goal of "Crown Princess" and present realization of this goal.

Husband an only child and must have center of the stage too.

No children.

Father's remarriage.

## TECHNIQUES FOR ADJUSTING TO FRUSTRATION

Positive, aggressive, and active techniques are used in making a good and reasonable adjustment. Since childhood, she has always made an active attack on her problems.

# APPENDIX B

## POPULATION DATA

Bernreuter: N=Neurotic Score; S=Self-sufficiency Score; I=Introversion Score;  
D=Dominance Score.

College Attended: W=Women's; C=Co-educational.

### POPULATION DATA ON FIFTY CASE HISTORIES

Case Number	Age of Woman	Marital Status	Woman's Income	Husband's Maximum Income	Detroit Advanced Intelligence Test Scores	Thorndike Schedule	Bernreuter Inventory				College Attended
							N	S	I	D	
1	36	M	.....	10,000	152	38	49	80	65	61	C
2	29	M	.....	3,600	190	12	6	95	6	95	W
3	25	S	1,200	.....	128	17	66	38	60	25	C
4	34	M	.....	7,200	121.5	35	40	26	27	67	C
5	35	M	.....	6,000	152	40	5	81	7	89	W
6	31	M	2,150	1,800	165	20	41	41	39	66	C
7	39	M	.....	2,500	159.5	62	54	96	51	68	C
8	29	M	.....	6,500	228	38	31	91	46	93	C
9	28	S	1,200	.....	164	39	35	26	37	76	C
10	31	M	.....	3,250	156	16	5	54	9	94	C
11	27	M	.....	6,000	168	93	92	12	94	24	C
12	33	M	.....	4,200	156	31	30	83	35	78	C
13	39	M	.....	3,750	137	48	57	27	53	50	C
14	27	M	.....	4,500	200	39	37	90	23	60	W
15	33	M	.....	3,200	183	37	69	44	74	29	W
16	24	M	180*	900	197	37	3	97	5	98	C
17	27	M	.....	1,200	145	62	56	8	48	35	C
18	26	M	.....	1,440	164	64	93	73	87	17	C
19	29	M	1,200	1,500	124	66	42	85	36	50	W
20	31	M	.....	20,000	159	37	31	25	36	71	W
21	28	M	.....	2,980	162	20	6	95	7	99	C
22	25	M	.....	3,600	181	40	46	59	55	65	C
23	46	M	*	5,000	181	27	13	76	6	87	W
24	32	M	600**	3,000	162	75	56	26	51	48	C
25	36	M	.....	6,000	125	25	5	88	12	99	C
26	33	M	.....	7,500	132	54	81	7	76	4	C
27	25	S	720	.....	...	48	55	63	38	12	C
28	29	M	.....	16,000	184	91	94	66	99	42	W
29	36	M	.....	2,800	184	25	26	53	14	66	C
30	29	M	.....	2,400	184	45	49	92	64	86	W
31	35	M	1,000**	5,000	162	37	33	83	32	93	C

## POPULATION DATA ON FIFTY CASE HISTORIES (Continued)

Case Number	Age of Women	Marital Status	Woman's Income	Husband's Maximum Income	Detroit Advanced Intelligence Test Scores	Therstone Schedule	Bernreuter Inventory				College Attended
							N	S	I	D	
32	25	S	1,920	.....	148	25	34	60	25	56	C
33	26	M	.....	1,500	182	27	64	58	72	81	W
34	29	M	.....	4,000	...	..	..	..	..	..	C
35	26	M	840	2,400	123	113	97	1	97	14	C
36	31	M	....	10,000	153	19	11	94	7	91	W
37	31	D	1,500	.....	194	19	63	93	12	99	C
38	26	S	{ 1,500** 1,400	.....	138	19	64	39	62	29	C
39	34	S	1,750	.....	131	50	37	84	42	68	C
40	31	M	.....	10,000	152	48	85	16	82	6	W
41	32	M	*	4,000	170.4	42	35	84	33	82	W
42	32	M	.....	20,000	...	50	86	65	70	18	W
43	32	M	.....	9,000	178	40	68	88	81	95	C
44	30	M	1,200**	8,000	166	36	18	22	16	63	W
45	30	M	60,000**	6,000	167	36	5	17	88	95	C
46	33	M	300	5,000	176	64	85	7	87	10	W
47	37	M	.....	6,000	156	52	53	62	60	71	W
48	30	S	1,920	.....	175	58	49	31	46	66	W
49	27	S	{ 800** 1,800	.....	236	26	10	69	17	95	C
50	40	S	2,800	.....	114	54	52	37	37	39	C

\* Woman's Income for Part-Time Work

\*\* Woman's Unearned Income

## APPENDIX C

### BRIEF OUTLINE FOR INTENSIVE RESEARCH— LIFE HISTORIES

(From Merrill-Palmer Advisory Service for College Women)

*Periods of Infancy, Early Childhood,  
Pre-Adolescence, and Adulthood*

- I. Family history of woman
  - A. Paternal history of woman
  - B. Maternal history of woman
  - C. Family history of woman
- II. Developmental history of woman
  - A. Physical development
    1. Physical examination and status
    2. Disease history
    3. Physical growth and nutritional development
    4. Physical crises in life of woman
      - (a) Pre-natal
      - (b) Birth
      - (c) Infancy and early childhood
      - (d) Pubertal onset
      - (e) Pregnancy-lactation period
      - (f) Involution and menopause
  - B. Intellectual development of woman
    1. Intellectual development with educational history
      - (a) Preschool
      - (b) Elementary school
      - (c) Secondary school
      - (d) College
      - (e) Since college
    2. Transcript of college credits
    3. Detroit Advanced Intelligence Test
  - C. Social and emotional development
    1. Woman's relationship to parental family to date
      - (a) Early memories and impressions (before 6 years)
      - (b) Childhood (6 to 12)
      - (c) Adolescence
      - (d) Youth-adulthood (16 to time of college graduation or time of marriage)

2. Woman's relationship to group outside the family
  - (a) Early memories and impressions
  - (b) Childhood
  - (c) Adolescence
  - (d) Adulthood
3. Courtship history
4. Marital history or surrogate
  - (a) Married life
  - (b) Parent-child relationship
  - (c) Single life
5. Sex history—complete from childhood
6. Personality patterns
  - (a) Personality traits and characteristics
  - (b) Personality difficulties
  - (c) Personality tests  
Bernreuter  
Thurstone  
Vernon-Allport  
Observational Rating Scale
7. Emotional and social crises
8. Recreation, aesthetic interests, play and leisure
  - (a) Recreation and play history
  - (b) Leisure-time study
9. Religious history and attitudes
  - (a) Parents
  - (b) Siblings
  - (c) Relatives
  - (d) Woman
10. Vocation
  - (a) Training, guidance, experiences, changes, etc.
  - (b) Strong Vocational Interest Blank for Women
11. Financial planning and history
  - (a) Background of attitudes and experiences concerning money matters
  - (b) Present attitudes and plans in regard to money
  - (c) Knowledge of economics
12. Civic-public attitudes and activities
13. Interests, ideals and aspirations

III. Interview with other members of the families (husband, parents, children, etc.)

IV. Observational report.

## APPENDIX D

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